Intergenerational Narratives:

American Responses to the Holocaust

by

Sarah C. Dean

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

David William Foster, Chair
Claudia Sadowski-Smith
Angelita Reyes

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines U. S. American intergenerational witnesses to the Holocaust, particularly how addressees turned addressors maintain an ethical obligation to First Generation witnesses while creating an affective relation to this history for new generations. In response to revisionism and the incommunicability of the Holocaust, a focus on (accurate) First Generation testimony emerged that marginalizes that of intergenerational witnesses. The risk of such a position is that it paralyzes language, locking the addressee into a movement always into the past. Using examples of intergenerational witnesses (moving from close to more distant relationships), this project argues that there is a possibility for ethical intergenerational response. There are two major discussion arcs that the work follows: self-reflexivity and the use of the Banality of Evil as a theme. Self-reflexivity in intergenerational witnessing calls attention to the role of the author as transgenerational witness, an act that does not seek to appropriate the importance or position of the Holocaust survivor because it calls attention to a subjective site in relation to the survivor and the communities of memory created within the text. The other major discussion arc moves from traditional depictions of the Banality of Evil to ones that challenge the audience to consider the way evil is conceptualized after the Holocaust and its implications in contemporary life. In these ways, intergenerational witnesses move from addressee to addressors, continuing to stress the importance of this history through the imperative to pass Holocaust testimony onward into the future.

DEDICATION

To Eugenia DeLamotte, Joyce Briscoe,

and, as always,

my husband, Alexander Scott Hughes

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

So, how does a white woman of European descent raised in a Christian tradition start writing about the Holocaust? On a certain level, the answer is obvious: the Holocaust demands a moral response that acknowledges not only its factual reality but also investigates and tries to understand what the fact of its occurrence means for us as a society. And yet, as individuals constantly point out to me, the demands I see are not universally acknowledged; for many, the Holocaust is something that happened in the past, unconnected to our current existence. So, does the fact that I see a kind of moral imperative really acknowledge why I came to study the Holocaust? In the end, is it the fact that there is really no set response to the Holocaust why I came to study responses to the Holocaust rather than the event itself? Am I only writing to find my place in response to the Holocaust?

Can I admit to a certain fear? As a scholar, it is so easy to use the interpretive models with which we are trained to distance ourselves from the subject of our research. And, in making our research into an object, what potential do we contain to wrong what we are studying? And yet, how else are we able to deal with our subjects without potentially being overwhelmed? How much does our subject position potentially affect our analysis?

I ask these questions because I feel I am already guilty of objectifying someone's story, of using interpretive tools to distance myself in a safe cocoon of intellectual analysis. In many ways, this experience is the beginning of why I

came to this project. As an undergraduate in English, I pursued two major courses of study. In English, I focused on 20th century African American writers for my Honors thesis. In my minor, History, I focused primarily on WWII. The link between the two, for me, was that both chains of study spoke to an understanding of contemporary society—how and why are we who we are as a culture?

In one of my history classes, I was asked to interview any individual who was alive during WWII. Through my mother's volunteer work at the local library, she connected me to a man who had served in WWII. While he was lucky enough to escape the horror of the Normandy invasion by a few days, he was unfortunately captured almost immediately after he arrived in France. The bulk of his time during the war was spent in POW camps; when he was finally liberated, he said he weighed 90 pounds. For the most part, I sat, took notes, and made sure the voice recorder was working. I remember that I had come over later in the day to his home in the trailer park and that the room we were sitting in was warm from the late afternoon exposure and no air conditioning.

The details of his narrative are vague now; after all, this interview happened well over a decade ago. But there is one part that still is clear. He was talking about how his group was continually being moved due to the Allied victories. Finally, he and his fellow POWs were put onto a train and sent into Germany; they traveled for a couple days with minimal food and water. When they finally arrived in the small German town, children threw rocks at them as they were forced into the camp. At this point, his group was desperate for

water…what little rations they were given had been used and they welcomed their arrival as a chance to finally get some water. Yet, when they came to the camp, they found that all of the water containers were dry. And then, "out of a clear blue sky, it began to rain." He said it was a miracle.

And, suddenly, my mind began to wander and I found myself thinking about how I would analyze this part of his story; that it was like a piece of magical realism (which, of course, the critic I am now will say it was not). He was silent for a bit and I suddenly found myself pulled out of the sort of day dream I was in to see him looking at me, his tearing eyes demanding that I recognize his emotion. This was how he saw that experience and, whether or not I agreed with his interpretation, I had to acknowledge it. I felt (and still feel) ashamed. In that moment, I allowed my subject position—the fact that I did not have his experiences, that I did not follow a faith—to overwhelm his narrative. In looking back at that experience, I do not think it is necessarily wrong to approach witness testimony with a critical lens. The issue was that it became a misreading, a potential usurpation of his experience that, fortunately, was caught.

The interview with the WWII survivor became a moment where I began to look at the ways in which my subject position could potentially affect my work as a scholar. I began to question how I and we, as a society, approach historical events. What, within our realm of experience, allows us to connect to the past? It was during my first semester as a teacher that I learned that the gaps that separated individuals from events were more complex than just time. It could be

the medium through which we experienced an event that could affect how we perceived it.

I began teaching at Arizona State University in the Fall of 2001. Within a month from the start of the semester, 9/11 happened. One of the ways that ASU responded to 9/11 was by asking the teachers in the department of English to act as first level trauma counselors—basically, to help students deal with the trauma of the event by taking a class period to talk about what students (and ourselves) were feeling and give students resources to seek (real) counselors if they needed it. Our classes were chosen because of the relatively small class size and potentially closer connections with our students. Almost all of the students from my two freshman composition classes came to our next class meetings. Some had family in New York; others were worried about family and friends who were traveling. None of my students, however, had anyone who was directly caught in the attacks…perhaps a key point in understanding the position from which they were witnessing.

During our conversation, we came to talk about the obsessive ways we were watching the attacks, almost as if we could not stop watching the television, the medium through which we witnessed the events and the aftermath. At one point, one of my students talked about what the attacks "looked like," in particular, that the attacks looked like scenes from the movie, *Independence Day*, where the aliens destroyed landmarks around the world (a beam coming down from alien space crafts and the buildings below exploding/collapsing). Many of the students agreed, particularly those who did not have a strong connection to or

memory of the sites of the attacks. I was initially surprised by the connections the students were making until I came to consider what, within their realm of experience, they had to draw on to allow them to understand what they were seeing. None of them had witnessed destruction on that scale before except through film and television shows—through fiction. The medium through which they were witnessing, the television, added to that sensation. Intellectually, they knew these events were real but the emotional affect was lessened through the ways in which they applied what they were witnessing to their own lives. Even though most of the class saw 9/11 as it was happening (in particular, the second plane hitting the Twin Towers and onward), there was a distance already in place between themselves and the event.

In combining both of these experiences, I began to question how individuals came to understand and interpret historical events—what was innate in the position of the intergenerational witness and what could be read as a misappropriation. Perhaps more central to those questions, however, was how new generations were responding to the history of the Holocaust. I still remember a couple of years ago listening to a barista (she was perhaps 17 or 18 years old, still in high school) talking about how, every year in school, she studied the Holocaust. What she didn't know, she said, was why she had to study the Holocaust every year for the past ten. Clearly, she knew the history but it failed to affect her—she saw no application of the Holocaust to her own life. As we move further away from that event and as the last witnesses disappear, the fear is that response will become all too common. Perhaps the ultimate concerns of this

work is why this response happens and how might we counteract it—how can we transmit the history and trauma of the Holocaust in ways that have an affective impact on new generations without violating our ethical responsibilities to those who experienced the Holocaust.

In chapter one, I discuss the potential for the discourses surrounding the Holocaust to fall into stasis and how intergenerational responses potentially allow for a bridge to overcome the differend and revivify communities of memory. In a response to revisionism, a focus on (accurate) First Generation testimony arose that marginalized or excluded intergenerational responses to the Holocaust. Yet, in spite of that focus, there is a possibility for an ethical intergenerational response that utilizes a self-reflexive position and addresses our conceptualization of evil after the Holocaust. In chapter two, I begin a discussion arc on self-reflexivity and the use of the Banality of Evil as a theme with Art Spiegelman's *Maus* books. Through the way in which Spiegelman's texts function as autobiography, he calls attention to his act of entextualizing his father's story. This begins an arc of discussion throughout the work from the most self-reflexive texts to the least. Speigelman's work also reflects the beginning of an arc from a minor discussion of the Banality of Evil (centered on his father's choiceless choices) to the more developed uses in the later texts discussed in this project.

Chapter three focuses on a discussion of Joseph Skibell's *Blessing on the Moon*. His self-reflexive position as an intergenerational witness is invoked through the character based on his great grandfather. By beginning the novel with Chaim Skibelski's death, Skibell calls attention to the way in which he accesses

the memory; he has a family connection that is marked by loss since he cannot access the memory of those family members killed in the Holocaust directly. Skibell's text also utilizes the themes of the Banality of Evil (through his portrayal of Chaim as a flawed character) and a stylized version of what Langer calls the deathlife narrative. Chapter four, the discussion of Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated* continues the self-reflexive discussion arc through its use of metafiction and the creation of a memory that replaces his actual experience in the Ukraine, where he found no trace of his grandfather's shtetl. Foer's novel addresses the Banality of Evil through the role of the perpetrator—the one who faces a choiceless choice and bears the guilt for that decision. Indeed, the emotional consequences of that choice are passed down through the generations until it is finally confronted. Like Skibell, Foer uses a stylized version of the deathlife narrative, especially in terms of the idea that one's life is marked by the death of another. The chapter ends with the creation of a mini arc of discussion concerning the adaptation of the novel into a film; by changing the character of Alexander's grandfather into a Jewish victim, Liev Schreiber changes the message underlining Foer's use of the Banality of Evil in the novel. This leads to a question of whether film, as a medium, limits discussions on the Banality of Evil that force the audience into a direct consideration of it in relation to their own lives.

In Chapter five, I discuss the novel and film versions of *The Pawnbroker*. Of the novels discussed in this work, it is the least self-reflexive; in contrast to the other works discussed, Edward Lewis Wallant calls attention to his position as

author through the setting, New York. In addition, Wallant's use of the deathlife narrative most closely fits the description provided by Langer—someone whose journey chronologically forward is limited by his memories of the past and the unnatural deaths of his friends and family. Wallant's use of the theme on the Banality of Evil is, however, less narrow since it draws potential parallels between the social conditions of blacks in New York and the Holocaust. These parallels do not mean that both experiences are interchangeable; rather, the text asks its audience to consider how the Banality of Evil continues to exist. While Sidney Lumet's film captures that message in relation to the character of Sol Nazerman and his participation in a criminal syndicate, the film fails to draw a connection to institutional power structures by changing the white mob boss to an African American, thus indicating that the levels of violence seen in the film are perpetuated by blacks on their own communities.

The final chapter draws out a comparison between intergenerational witnessing in African American literature to that within Holocaust literature. Through Signifying(g), African American authors form connections to other works and the history of slavery, thus enabling these authors to transmit this history to new generations. In each act of repetition and revision, the intergenerational witness calls attention to his or her position in relation to the trauma—an act that does not seek to usurp the original testimony. Instead, the goal is to make the history pertinent to new generations. The difficulty for both forms of intergenerational witnessing is how to create an affective relationship with a larger audience without being appropriated by the dominant discourse.

In many ways, *The Pawnbroker* functions as a metadiscourse on the need for intergenerational transmission. Nazerman is a last native speaker, living with the memory of his trauma but unable to communicate it to those around him. Indeed, he does not even try since he feels that none can understand his experiences. It defies language. In focusing solely on First Generation witnesses as those alone who have a right to speak about the Holocaust, there is a risk of creating a kind of hopelessness in each addressee. Trapped into a movement always into the past, how do we move into the future? It paralyzes language. Instead, we need to focus on how to continue creating communities of memory through our roles as addressors, mindful of our obligations to the native speakers but also concerned with how to reach new generations in the future.

CHAPTER 2

MOVING FROM MODERN TO POSTMODERN DIALOGUES: LOOKING AT THE VALUE AND DANGER OF LIMINALITY IN INTERGENERATIONAL NARRATIVES

> Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky.
>
> Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever.
>
> Never shall I forget the nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never.
>
> -Elie Wiesel, *Night*

> Nephew: "I'm bored with WWII."
> Me: "Excuse me?"
> Nephew: "I'm bored with WWII."
> Me: "Why? Why would you say that?"
> Nephew: "I just am. I'm sick of all the WWII video games. All you get to do is run around and kill a lot of Nazis. It's just…boring."
>
> -from a private conversation a little over two years ago.

Perhaps it is unfair to pair the above passages together—one representing Wiesel's powerful depiction of his first night at Auschwitz and one representing a conversation between my nephew and myself. After all, it is hard to conceive of anyone reading Wiesel's account to respond with boredom. Plus, I am fairly sure that part of the reason my nephew said what he did was to provoke me since he knew that WWII, specifically the Holocaust, was a focus of my studies. Even supposing that my nephew's comments were meant to provoke, the basis on

which he was drawing his knowledge—a series of video games like *Medal of Honor* and *Call of Duty* —illustrates the intergenerational gaps that potentially exist between the discourses of first generation witnesses of the Holocaust and those of generations growing up 50 years later. The gap between the canon of Holocaust literature (mainly testimony) and now goes beyond concerns of the potential impossibility of finding common discourses in which to hold the Holocaust. The Holocaust, as one of the most traumatic and inexpressible events of the century, continues to elude human understanding, especially as it is passed down from one generation to the next; in its horror, perhaps it can never be fully understood. Or, perhaps, the ways in which we have traditionally tried to express it are what ultimately limits any attempt. By continually defining the "Witness" (as in who has the right to be a witness) through a focus on factual, verified testimony, a canonized discourse was created. While the canon of Holocaust literature served a useful purpose in counteracting revisionists who continue to emerge today, a form of stasis emerged that limits how the Holocaust is passed down and what sorts of discourses can emerge from each generations' responses to the Holocaust.

Instead of exploring the complexity of various discourse encounters that postmodern thought draws on from an appropriation of oral traditions passed down through generations, the canonization of Holocaust literature represents a modernist perspective (paralleled to the idea of the written word) focusing on narratives that—for very good reasons—uphold (document) the factual reality of the Holocaust. Stasis becomes an issue in that there is resistance (even as far as

outright rejection) to narratives written by those who have no direct experience of the Holocaust and who therefore, by the very position of its writers, create fictional narratives.[1] Because many view the Holocaust as a tragic fulfillment of modernity, the event also fractures modernist modes of understanding. By looking at the potentialities of postmodern responses combined with the freedoms offered by postmodernist thought, we can begin to (re)negotiate the intergenerational witness: one who is the addressee of the original Holocaust narratives and whose obligation is not to the addressor but to retelling, one who is fundamentally separated from the event and yet speaks to it, one who has a sense of justice that can be without precedent, one who will influence how new generations can and will approach this memory. In essence, intergenerational witnesses who represent the best hopes of those who pass on their stories and their worst fears.

The canonization of Holocaust discourses, in the beginning of its evolution, arises out of necessity. The fear that the historical reality of the devastation and brutality that the Holocaust represents would be subject to deniers was felt immediately after the war. In 1948, Dwight D. Eisenhower's autobiography, *Crusade in Europe* (a title that clearly indicates a metaphysical Good vs. Evil paradigm that continues to dominate popular culture's response to the Nazis in particular), reflects Eisenhower's conviction that the scale of atrocity committed, counteracting as it does any commonly held metanarratives of the progression of humanity, would invoke disbelief. His description of his first tour of what he calls a "horror camp" indicates his recognition of the importance of

witnessing: “I visited every nook and cranny of the camp because I felt it my duty to be in a position from then on to testify at first hand about these things in case there ever grew up at home the belief or assumption that ‘the stories of Nazi brutality were just propaganda’” (Eisenhower 409). In this moment, Eisenhower recognizes the possibility of other, potentially contradictory discourses and the risk for those discourses to, at an extreme level, deny the Holocaust. At a less extreme although perhaps equally damaging level, Eisenhower recognizes the potential for indifference; the widespread use of propaganda, a discourse based on exaggeration, could, he felt, lead to dismissal of the full magnitude of the Holocaust.

While Eisenhower’s autobiography is useful for understanding the early importance of factual testimony of the Holocaust (something that the Nuremburg trials also established and problematized), his testimony is not part of the canon of Holocaust literature partly because his discourse is outside the event—he is witness to the result, not the experience of the Holocaust. Testimony instead turned towards those who were witnesses (now called first-generation witnesses); for Americans, Elie Wiesel and Anne Frank are perhaps the two most dominate figures. Frank’s diary, which holds a key foundation in understanding popular cultural representations of the Holocaust, generally serves as a point of entry into Holocaust history for many young schoolchildren (such was the case in my primary education). The reasons behind the prominence of both Wiesel and Frank in American education about the Holocaust lie in the manner of both authors’ ability to engage their audience and the absolute factual nature of their

stories (even taking into consideration Frank's father's editing of his daughter's diary after her death in Bergen-Belsen). The focus on factual discourses became central in determining which texts became canonized.

The canonized discourse that arose in Holocaust testimony was initially established in response to revisionist discourses that questioned anything from whether the Holocaust actually happened to Hitler's role in the Holocaust. Thus, testimonies of the Holocaust were subject to documentation, especially given the perceived damage of fictionalized testimonies that claimed to be factual such as Jerzy Kosinski's *The Painted Bird* or the scandal arising in late 2008 concerning Herman Rosenblat's *Angel at the Fence*.[3] In his discussion of the difficulties facing artists working in visual mediums, Stephen C. Feinstein characterizes the Holocaust as "forbidden": "The term *forbidden* is used here because of the taboos of both depiction and metaphor, as well as the question of authenticity" (203). While visual mediums are subject to perhaps more forms of scrutiny given many popular interpretations about Adorno's injunction against aestheticizing the Holocaust, the question of authenticity permeates all responses to the Holocaust. The process of documentation (writing memoirs or recording oral testimonies) is subject to analysis that checks the validity of the memory. With this form of documentation comes an idea of permanence: the documentation can be amended, referred to, but not ultimately altered—it will continue to exist in its original state. It is this idea of permanence, of documented facts, that many historians and scholars draw on in their studies of the Holocaust. The major source is eyewitness accounts, even though many of these exist as oral performances that

are recorded (in audio, video, or, more recently, in digital formats including YouTube) rather than in a written form. Despite the potential freedoms that are possible, even with responses to written testimonies, stasis emerges as only factual, first person responses are seen as valid forms of entry into a relationship with the Holocaust.

The focus on documentation—and the idea that they can be evaluated objectively—leads to certain questions even as one utilizes first person witness accounts. In *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Dori Laub discusses the role of memory as a constructed act. Given the reality that it is impossible to recount events exactly as they happened since all memory results from interpretations of experience, the testimonies of Holocaust survivors is questioned because it does not provide an objective (if such a position is possible) account of the events witnessed. Laub recounts an experience of a survivor, a woman, narrating her experience of the camps; in particular, Laub focuses on her account of the explosion of one of the chimneys in Auschwitz. During a conference at which this woman's recorded testimony was shown, Laub talks of the response to her testimony that four chimneys exploded instead of one: "A lively debate ensued. The testimony was not accurate, historians claimed. Historically, only one chimney was blown up, not all four. Since the memory of the testifying woman turned out to be, in this way, fallible, one could not accept—nor give credence to—her whole account of the events" (*Testimony* 59-60). In this sense, the truth (the objective reality) is deemed even more important than the affective truth the survivor is trying to convey. In his opposition of this dismissal

of the testimony, Laub states: "The woman was testifying…not to the number of the chimneys blown up, but to something else, more radical, more crucial: the reality of an unimaginable occurrence. One chimney blown up in Auschwitz was as incredible as four" (*Testimony* 60). For Laub, the validity of the narrative rests on her ability to convey a subjective truth—one that encompasses the emotional reality of the experience. Through this narrative, one can see the dangers of a focus on static forms of documentation: the cost of resisting revisionism rests on limiting the affective quality of the accounts, which fundamentally restricts how this history is transmitted to new generations of listeners.

The documentation surrounding Holocaust testimony (with its subsequent scrutiny) leads to a very Modernist form of stasis. In the move away from oral narratives that invoked history and cultural values for many groups, Western culture adopted written forms that documented such things as history, ownership, etc. Fundamentally, the precedence given to writing lays in its perceived permanence. The downside to that permanence is that it resists adaptation; in oral forms, each new speaker added and changed the narrative, thus giving it a life and relevance that written texts have a much harder time grasping. By impacting the affective potential, written documents have a tendency to lie in stasis, defined by the moment in which it was written. While certain texts have transcended their respective contexts, new readers often fail to see their relevance, especially as metanarratives such as humanism have lost currency. The issue of perceived relevance is the danger that Holocaust testimony faces. It is also the question that discourses on the Holocaust must face: Is it better to continue to combat possible

revisionists by focusing on factual narratives or should one allow/encourage/nourish affective truths about what the Holocaust might mean transgenerationally? Both possibilities are fraught with dangers. In the latter scenario, postmodern responses, while certainly encouraging the give and take structure of oral traditions, potentially mean a loss of control that many Holocaust survivors, historians, and scholars are unwilling to grant—especially at the expense of the six million who died during the Holocaust.

There are, however, dangers in relying on Modernist forms of understanding to shape how we respond to the Holocaust. At a fundamental level, the Holocaust is, for many, simultaneously the result and ending of modernity. Drawing on Lyotard and Bauman, David B. Clarke notes, "After Auschwitz, modernity as a whole is flung into crisis—for the Holocaust was not some kind of reversion to premodern barbarity, but a systematic deployment and implementation of *modern* rationality. It even *exemplified* modernity" (Clarke 110). The rationality that informed the bureaucratic structure and implementation of the mass genocide undermines structures for making meaning such as humanism and progressivism, also components of Modernity. Yet, even as one may look on the Holocaust as an ending of Modernity, those discourses still exist. In his analysis of the historiography of the Holocaust, Dan Stone expresses his concerns about how Modernist modes affect historical analysis of the Holocaust:

> No doubt in several centuries' time the Holocaust will be no more than another disaster in the history books. But the philosophy of history, which will permit this outcome, this normalization of the

> horrific, can be challenged. Indeed, it must be, for this is not merely a question of finding a philosophy of history suitable for guarding the memory of the victims (which can easily become melancholic fascination); rather, it is a question of replacing a philosophy of history which is itself part of a culture which permits mass murder as an option for self-styled civilized states. Incorporation domesticates violence, and passes on the seeds of disaster. (3)

One of the most shocking examples of the tendency of historians to normalize violence can be found in Stone's critique of modern German historiographers Rainer Zitelman and Michael Prinz and their focus on "socially progressive" elements of the Nazi state: "But it is precisely because their project takes for granted the terror of the regime that concentrating on its 'normalities' or 'achievements' in, for example, social policy, does allow the horror to be forgotten" (37). By reinscribing the Nazi regime within a metanarrative of progressivism, the Holocaust becomes a "stepping stone" of history rather than the challenge to Modernity. Are we then to reconceptualize Hannah Arendt's notion of the Banality of Evil as a necessary step in mankind's progress? The problem of continually allowing and participating in evil becomes, in this scenario, something that mankind cannot control—rather than metaphysical concepts of evil, we are faced with historical forces that are just as much outside our power…and that leave us just as free of responsibility.

While such a critique is certainly easier for me given my position as an American, the modern discourse of progressivism offers other trials to the affective value of Holocaust narratives, especially if they are in a form a stasis. The ongoing challenge lies in the question of "What does this have to do with me?" While the figure of the Nazi in popular culture is now a sign of evil (just as the cliché of the cowboy in the black hat once was), it is often seen as out of context for modern society and even divorced from the framework of the Holocaust itself.[4] Thus, my nephew, bored by the simulated act of continually killing Nazis in a video game, fails to see a relationship to his present day life either through the concept of the Banality of Evil or through a connection to first generation witnesses. The stasis embedded in the move towards a form of canonization of Holocaust literature that centers on factual representation means that there can be an impact on the affective nature of these texts, especially as they enter into a liminal space where the reader, taking his/her discourses into this space in-between, constructs his/her own meaning.

The possibility for detachment between discourses through a potential negation of the affective quality of first generation witness accounts as they are received transgenerationally can seriously impact how new generations understand the Holocaust, especially if we conceptualize that transmission through a postmodern framework of the relationship between the addressor and addressee. In this sense, we are looking at a return to the types of structures one can see in oral traditions. The addressor speaks; the addressee listens. The addressee becomes the new addressor. In oral tradition, this passage from

addressor to addressee who becomes addressor marks the continuation of culture: "To be named is to be told about. There are two aspects to this: every narrative, even an apparently anecdotal one, reactualizes names and nominal relations. In repeating it, the community assures itself of the permanence of legitimacy of its world of names by way of the recurrence of this world in its stories. And, from another standpoint, certain narratives explicitly tell stories of naming" (*The Differend* 153). In this sense, the repetition within the stories ensures the passage of cultural values through generations. By looking at the stasis surrounding first generation witness responses, the passage of these stories through generations faces a serious obstacle. It relies on the first generation witness to transcend their own historicity and rely on a universal sense of humanism—one that many feel was destroyed through the fact of the Holocaust itself.

The Holocaust also presents challenges as one tries to conceptualize the (original) addressor. Who is the true witness to the Holocaust? For Lyotard, this informs his concept of the differend: "The differend is the unstable state and instance of language wherein something which must be put into phrase cannot yet be" (*The Differend* 13). The impossibility of putting into phrase, in a legal sense, "would be a case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments" (*The Differend* xi). It is with the legal interpretation of the differend that Lyotard begins his argument in response to the revisionist claims of Robert Faurisson, who argued that since there was no deportee who could claim to have seen a gas chamber, the Holocaust itself was a hoax. The differend arises, as Lyotard notes,

due to the nature of the gas chamber: "…there is no victim that is not dead; otherwise, this gas chamber would not be what he or she claims it to be" (*The Differend* 14). If one follows this path of reasoning, it would lead to an absence of justice: "This is what a wrong [tort] would be: a damage [dommage] accompanied by the loss of a means to prove the damage" (*The Differend* 15, translator's notes). The damage, the loss of life, exists; in order to address that damage, one needs to be able to prove that it happened. For Lyotard, the ones who can witness are those who survived—the act of narration offers a means to resolve the differend: "The multitude of phrase regimens and of genres of discourse finds a way to embody itself, to neutralize differends, in narratives" (*The Differend* 158). Thus, the original addressor—the ones who witnessed the gas chamber and died—addresses the addressee, the one whose survival means that the addressor's story can be passed on.

Giorgio Agamben's conceptualization of testimony and the transmutations that occur as stories move from those who cannot speak to those who can further illustrates the complexity of the conceptualization of the addressor and the process through which testimony is achieved. Much like Lyotard, Agamben's concepts begin with the speechless; in *Remnants of Auschwitz*, he also deals with those who died although his ultimate sign of the one who is speechless is the Musselmann, based off of Primo Levi's representation:

> The *Muselmann* stands in this point [the convergence between ideas that the lesson of Auschwitz is the human being survives the human being or the non-human in the form of the Muselmann];

> and it is in him that we find the third, truest, and most ambiguous sense of the thesis, which Levi proclaims when he writes that, 'they, the *Muselmanner*, the drowned are the complete witness': *the human being is the inhuman; the one whose humanity is completely destroyed is the one who is truly human*. (133)

Here, it is those that have lost their humanity who are the complete witness of the horror of the Holocaust; death does not necessitate the same loss of all that makes one human as does those who are pushed beyond the limits of what one is capable of holding. While Agamben is cautious about the use of the word inhuman (recognizing the implication that this could potentially fulfill Nazi rhetoric that called Jews "inhuman"), this extreme position where one is physically alive and yet psychically dead represents an aspect of the horror of the Holocaust—the position between human and dehumanized—that the death tolls alone cannot address.

In looking at where Lyotard and Agamben conceptualize the "true" witness, one begins to imagine the testimonial weight assigned to those witnesses who survived, the first generation Holocaust witnesses. To be responsible for the stories of not just the relatives, friends, neighbors who died, but all of the six million deaths and all those whose experiences pushed them beyond what one individual is capable of bearing is an extraordinary burden. It is also a burden that any one person's testimony can never fully encompass. Thus, the truthfulness assigned to first generation responses relies on its factual truthfulness but also on its ability to also speak for those who cannot—a step that relies on the first

generation witness's to testify beyond oneself. Agamben envisions the testimony between speaker and speechless thus:

> Testimony takes place where the speechless one makes the speaking one speak and where the one who speaks bears the impossibility of speaking in his own speech, such that the silent and the speaking, the inhuman and the human enter into a zone of indistinction in which it is impossible to establish the position of the subject, to identify the 'imagined substance' of the 'I' and, along with it, the true witness. (Agamben 120)

In this passage, Agamben seeks to create a witness position where both speaker and speechless occupy the same space that blurs the boundaries between the one who survived and the one who did not, thus erasing the subject position, "I." Testimony can only exist in between the speaker and the speechless, subjectivity and desubjectivity:

> But the relation between language and its existence, between *langue* and the archive, demands subjectivity as that which, in its very possibility of speech, bears witness to an impossibility of speech. This is why subjectivity appears as *witness*; this is why it can speak for those who cannot speak. Testimony is a potentiality that becomes actual through an impotentiality of speech; it is, moreover, an impossibility that gives itself existence through a possibility of speaking. These two movements cannot be identified either with a subject or with a consciousness; yet they cannot be

> divided into two incommunicable substances. Their inseparable intimacy is testimony. (Agamben 146)

Thus the two discourses—speech and the impossibility of speech—form a differend. For both authors, the addressors who cannot speak pass their stories on, which appears in the narratives/testimonies of the first generation witness.

The space in which these narratives/testimonies develop is impossible to define. For Agamben, the lack of boundaries—the sense of being always in-between—permeates the testimony. In much the same way, Lyotard conceptualizes the linking of phrases as a border zone:

> A phrase, which links and which is to be linked, is always a *pagus*, a border zone where genres of discourse enter into conflict over the mode of linking. War and commerce. It's in the *pagus* that the *pax* and the pact are made and unmade. The *vicus*, the *home*, the *Heim* is a zone in which the differend between genres of discourse is suspended. An "internal peace" peace is bought at the price of perpetual differends on the outskirts. (The same arrangement goes for the ego, that of self-identification). This internal peace is made through narratives that accredit the community of proper names as they accredit themselves. (*The Differend* 151)

This sense of liminality in both Lyotard and Agamben reflects the possibilities that come into play when discourses come into contact. In this sense, it follows a process of subjectivization in that the conflict of discourses resolves into a newly constructed "I," which is never completely stable since the process of

subjectivization is ongoing. Lyotard's reference to proper names refers again to his analysis of the Cashinahua—the ways in which an oral tradition passes down cultural discourse. In this sense, the differend is only resolved through the duality of the narrative that refers to the community from which it comes as it calls attention to itself. Thus, each addressee who becomes an addressor invokes the larger culture as he/she also references one's own position in relationship to the culture.

The role of referencing oneself is important in looking at the give and take between the addressor and the addressee since it highlights the danger inherent in transgenerational responses as well as their potential. In *Just Playing*, Lyotard notes that the transmission of discourse is embedded within culture:

> Here we are in a mode of transmission of discourse that elaborates itself through its insistence on the pole of reference (the one who speaks is someone who has been 'spoken') and on the pole of the narrattee (the one who speaks is someone who has been spoken to). The subject of the enunciation makes no claims of autonomy with respect to his discourse. On the contrary, both through his name and through the story he tells, he claims to belong to the tradition. (33)

Since the new narrator is embedded within a tradition, as in the Lyotard's example of the Cashinahua and the remembrance and passing down of names, the story reflects the culture of discourse in which it claims a part. Yet, there are dangers in the passing down of discourse through generations since the new

narrator is not necessarily completely tied to his/her original addressor: "In other words, someone speaks to me; he places me under obligation…What kind of obligation? The obligation to retell. But not necessarily to my teller. I am not obligated to give it back to him, no, that's not it; but I am obligated in the way of a relay that may not keep its charge but must pass it on" (*Just Playing* 35). While this lack of obligation may be less apparent in the internal peace established between the addressor and the first generation witness—the one who is our addressor— as conceptualized by both Agamben and Lyotard, it can easily become more apparent as the testimonies move through transgenerational narratives. In this sense, the self-referential aspect becomes important so that the new addressee sees the narrative as one that is "passed down." Yet, the self-referential characteristic of the transgenerational narratives potentially means that something can be left out, particularly if the new addressor's lack of obligation constitutes a revision of the facts/meaning behind the original narrative. In such a scenario, the differend cannot be resolved. In that sense, however, the transgenerational response is not passing on a culture/discourse since a revisionist response creates a new, potentially oppositional discourse.

The question becomes how are we able to begin judging what constitutes a transgenerational response and what constitutes a revisionist discourse? The current models of criteria, which reject all but factually accurate accounts, have limitations in their affective impact, as I discussed earlier. In addition, the act of structuring criteria limits the freedom of the postmodern addressee/addressor relationship and could also impact the affective quality of the narrative. While I

will be presenting two models on which I base my investigation of transgenerational texts later in this chapter, the self-reflexive and the e/affective use of the concept of the Banality of Evil, neither category presents specific criteria on which to judge texts. This is a deliberate choice. In exploring the affective impact of discourses in contact, the resulting analysis is and must be subjective. Further, the creation of a set of criteria moves the analysis back into Modernist modes of thinking about texts that, in turn, creates another form of stasis. This does not and cannot mean that judgment in impossible. Instead, I turn again to Lyotard to find a model of judgment through his concept of paganism: "…when I speak of paganism, I am not using a concept. It is a name, neither better nor worse than others, for the denomination of a situation in which one judges without criteria. And one judges not only in matters of truth, but also in matters of beauty (of aesthetic efficacy) and in matters of justice, that is, of politics and ethics, and all without criteria" (*Just Playing* 16). Since judgment in this sense operates on a case-by-case system without relying on precedent, it becomes possible to look at the texts in terms of the interplay of discourses that they offer, especially as they move through a transgenerational relay. In this way, truthfulness can become a component of "aesthetic efficacy" and ethics as one examines texts to see if the response embodies an e/affective response to the Holocaust.

One must ask, here, what constitutes an e/affective response? Certainly, a portion of that belongs to the talents of the storyteller to reach his or her audience—an important component of "aesthetic efficacy." Yet, it also requires,

as we've learned from Laub's story of the woman who recounts four chimneys being destroyed at Auschwitz, openness on the part of the addressee. Again we are faced with the potential conflict of discourses as they come into contact. In rejecting "truthfulness" as a stand-alone category, one must investigate what constitutes ethics as narrations are passed intergenerationally and through the conflict of discourses coming into contact or conflict through liminal spaces of subjectivization. In *Testimony*, one can see the process of discourses in contact in Felman's account of her class entitled "Literature and Testimony" where she explored the historical, the clinical, and the poetical dimensions of testimony (41).[5] Towards the end of the class, Felman chooses two videotaped Holocaust testimonies to show her class. In this way, she sought to end the class "with a striking, vivid, and extreme *real example* of the *liberating, vital function of testimony*;" the effect of the testimony was that it "carried the class beyond a limit I could foresee and had envisioned" (*Testimony* 47). In facing the crises in her class, Felman realizes "that the unpredicted outcome of the screening was itself a psychoanalytic enhancement of the way in which the class felt actively *addressed* not only by the videotape but by the intensity and intimacy of the testimonial encounter throughout the course" (48). The class, prepared as they were by the previous course readings, lectures, and discussion, entered into an addressor/addressee relationship with the Holocaust survivors that they watched in the videos. Felman's students did not simply look at the videos for the truthfulness of the testimony; rather, they began to deal with their relationship to the survivors' testimonies.

In recounting the crises of her class, Felman is depicting a liminal space as her students worked through the contact of discourses. After the silence immediately following the viewings, Felman's students began to talk. But this was not yet a new discourse. Instead, the talking was compulsive and fragmented but persistent as her students "could talk of nothing else no matter where they were, in other classes, study rooms, or dorms. They were set apart and set themselves apart from others who had not gone through the same experience. They were obsessed. They felt apart, and yet not quite together. They sought out each other and yet felt that they could not reach each other…They felt alone, suddenly deprived of their bonding to the world and to one another" (*Testimony* 48). In essence, Felman's students were caught in-between—not yet able to process a new discourse out of their sudden positioning as an addressee. The extreme nature of their liminality (in the context of exploring potential addressees of the first generation witness and not from the extreme limit figures like the Muselmanner that Agamben focuses upon) relied on their openness to being affected by the videotaped testimonies shown in the class.

The feeling of closeness, of being "*addressed*" by the first generation testimony becomes the foundation on which to build an understanding of ethics in transgenerational responses. In Avishi Margalit's *The Ethics of Memory*, he sets up the differences between ethics and morality in terms of the closeness of one's relationships:

> The drift of this idea…obviously hinges on the distinction between ethics and morality. In my account, this in turn is based on a

> distinction between two types of human relations: thick ones and thin ones. Thick relations are grounded in attributes such as parent, friend, lover, fellow-countryman. Thick relations are anchored in a shared past or moored in a shared memory. Thin relations, on the other hand, are backed by the attribute of being human…Thick relations are in general our relations to the near and dear. Thin relations are in general our relations to the stranger and the remote. (7)

In this sense, morality encompasses our sense of right as human beings; ethics governs our sense of right in our more personal relationships. The more personal the relationship, the more powerful the impetus is to do what is good (although this does not mean that the possibility of doing wrong does not occur in our thick relationships). Morality still holds an important role for the breadth of our relations since "We need morality to overcome our natural indifference to others. Indeed, we need morality not so much to counter evil as to counter indifference. Evil, like caring, is a scarce commodity. There is not so much banality of evil as banality of indifference. Yet, one has to admit that the combination of evil and indifference is lethal, like the combination of poison and water" (Margalit 34). The more distant the connection, the easier it is to put one's personal concerns (or those concerns governed by our thick relationships) over the rights we see by nature of being human. For the students in Felman's class, their relationship with the video taped testimony became thick by virtue of being addressed…and by allowing themselves to feel addressed in so personal a way.

The personal response of Felman's class to the testimony illustrates why, in terms of memories like that of the Holocaust, it is important for collective memory to be based on thick relations. The thinner the relationship, the easier it is for indifference to seep into the ways that memory is relayed to future generations, especially if the intergenerational transmission is not through communities that have a thick relationship to the Holocaust. The danger of my nephew's boredom with WWII (assuming that he was serious when he said it) lies in how easy it is for indifference to govern the way Holocaust discourses find a place in present-day consciousness. In moving from the dialectical relationship of morality and indifference towards a thick relationship, I am not arguing that one can become what Margalit calls a "moral witness"—a designation that relies on shared experience (in terms of the Holocaust, only first generation witnesses could be called moral witnesses in such a scenario).[6] Instead, I want to draw on Margalit's idea of a collective memory's ability to bring a memory "to life":

> What does the power, or rather the illusion of power, to bring to life by collective memory amount to? I believe that it amounts to a great deal. It strongly indicates that a community of memory is a community based not only on actual thick relations to the living but also on thick relations to the dead. It is a community that deals with life and death, where the element of commemoration verging on revivification [the idea that the dead are brought to life in essence, not form] is stronger than in a community based merely

> on communication. It is a community that is concerned with the issue of survival through memory. (Margalit 69)

By containing thick relations with both the living (first generation witnesses) and the dead, which echoes the limit positions that Lyotard and Agamben grapple with, an essence is preserved. Lawrence Langer invokes a similar conception of memory in stating "when memory imprints on us the meaning of the presence of 'absence' and animates the ghost that such a burden has imposed on our lives, then the heritage of the Holocaust will have begun to acquire some authenticity in out postwar culture" (xviii). In reviving the essence, one diminishes the possibility of indifference.

It is the essence that needs to survive in order for a cultural discourse to be passed down intergenerationally. In Lyotard's focus on the Cashinahua in both *The Differend* and in *Just Playing*, he notes the importance of names as the primary means through which the culture of the Cashinahua is transmitted. Margalit picks up a similar theme in his discussion of the colonel who forgot the name of one of his soldiers who was killed by friendly fire; the outrage that it sparked stems from the fact that the community felt that the colonel's inability to remember marked his lack of caring (18-19). Remembering a name, in this sense, marks a thick relationship. But the memory of names also marks the importance of the survival of the essence. Margalit then moves into a discussion of David Edgar's play, *Pentecost*, to further his point:

> They [the children on their way to a concentration camp] are squeezed into a cattle truck, so hungry that they eat the cardboard

> nametags tied to their necks. It is clear that no trace of the children and no trace of their names will be left after they perish. What is so terrifying about this play is not just the knowledge that the children are on their way to be murdered but that they are going to be murdered twice, both in body and in name. This image of the double murder is, I believe, at the core of our attitude toward memory in general, and in particular toward the memory of personal names as referring to the essence of human beings in a way nothing else does. (20-21)

Names, in this context, are the most visible signs of identity. If one dies, the hope that one's name will be passed on means that we feel that some part of our essence is also transmitted. Yet, the fact of the existence of the play that documents the loss of names (for, after all, how can we know who these children are for sure or if they even existed as the play depicts?) means that it responds to an essence embedded in memory. Thus, an essence can be transmitted that does not necessarily rely on names. The essential function of relaying a discourse is that it must address the essence of the memory—an essence tied to real life individuals. It is with them that we must have a thick relationship.

It is clear from the trauma of her students that Felman's class develops a thick relationship with the narratives/individuals they viewed in class. When the extent of the trauma becomes apparent to Felman, she decides to intervene, to help them deal with the experience. In her address to students, Felman notes the personal nature of the students' feelings: "Many of you, indeed, quite literally said

that they felt they *did not count* after the first session, that, had they been there in the camps, they are certain they would have died" (*Testimony* 51). As the students entered into the liminal space between their discourses and that of the Holocaust survivor, they began to compare their lives with that of the survivor—a very personal way of making meaning that is not unlike the experiences of second generation witnesses (in Chapter 2, I discuss some of the psychological studies of second generation witnesses in relation to Art Spiegelman's identity position as a child of Holocaust survivors). They are also compelled to pass on what they experienced. Felman quotes one of her students as saying, "I was compelled…to speak about the Holocaust testimonies, the class, etc., to friends who were not disinterested but who were perhaps a bit surprised" (*Testimony* 50). Thus, the students move from addressee to addressor, seeking to convey the essence of what is a new discourse. Yet, at this moment, they are still in a liminal space since no new, coherent discourse had yet emerged. The student goes on to say "This speaking was at best fragmentary, dissolving into silence: at moments, lapsing into long, obsessive monologues. It was absolutely necessary to speak of it, however incoherently…At times, I felt that I would simply have to abduct someone and lock them up in my room and tell them about the 'whole' thing" (*Testimony* 50). The fragmented nature of their speaking combined with the importance they see in conveying the essence of the memory, speaks to how personal a relationship they felt to the testimonies they witnessed. In many ways, the fragmentation of the discourse represents the fragmentation they feel in their own discourses. If we looked at this as a process of subjectivization, we could

say that the "I" is still split—fragmented by the discourse to which they give authority. In this moment, their discourse is fragmented because the "I" is split; until they work through the liminal space created by the discourses in contact, they will be unable to articulate a new, cohesive discourse.

In addressing the crises of her students, Felman assigns a writing activity that is designed to enable her students to gain a new discourse—one that addresses the students' feelings of inadequacy by empowering their subject position. In this sense, she is aware of the devastating blow to ego that the "*did not count*" had on her students. Rather than picking up the self-negating aspect of their response (which could lead to a potentially problematic new subject position for the students), Felman focuses on the value of their discourse: "And I am inviting you now to testify to that experience, so as to accept the obligation—and the right—to repossess yourselves, to take, in other words, the *chance to sign*, the *chance to count*" (*Testimony* 51). Here, Felman articulates a sense of obligation but, as Lyotard would say, it is not to the original addressor. Obligation, here, centers on oneself and the idea that our new discourses have meaning. It is an obligation to create new discourses and, by the very nature of the writing process, to relay the discourse to other addressees. At the same time, the urge to relay the message is based on the thick relationship the students felt with the testimonies they viewed.

Based on the two excerpts Felman includes in the chapter, a sense of how one passes on narratives combined with a feeling of collectivity and a focus on the importance of literature as a means of conveying memory emerge in the final

assignment. The first excerpt from a Chinese woman begins by questioning what gets passed on:

> He [the testifier] wondered aloud what sorts of testimony one leaves to one's children, when one does not confront the past. I thought at first, what sorts of burdens will I pass on to *my* children, in the unlikely event that I have any. And then I thought of my father, who lived through the Chinese Civil War, and four years of incarceration as a political prisoner on the Island of Taiwan. What sorts of burdens has he passed to me? (*Testimony* 55)

In the first part of the excerpt, the woman acknowledges the role of the relay in conveying memory. This quickly transforms to a self-reflexive questioning of her role as a relay—of becoming an addressor to her children, if she has them. The experience of the class also makes her aware of the multiple discourses she's received. The impact of the Holocaust testimony leads her to question what other discourses (burdens) she inherited from her father. The self-reflexive mode of her questioning gives her the tools to understand her discourse positions; it also allows her new addressees (we the readers, Felman) to glimpse the discourses at play in speaking her own testimony.

The second part of the excerpt from Felman's female student moves from the singular mode to comment on her sense of collectivity with the class. As a woman of Chinese descent, she tended to feel Othered in her interactions with classmates. Yet, the impact of being addressed and forming a thick relationship with the Holocaust testimonies creates a discourse of collective memory: "In an

odd sort of way, I feel a strange sort of collectivity has been formed in the class. This, of course is a most frightening thing. As I mentioned above, my mode of interaction with those whom I do not know, as always been one of radical differentiation, rather than of collectivization. My autonomy has been rendered precarious, even fragile" (*Testimony* 55). Given that she values her discourse of independence, the new discourse of collective memory in which she is engaged through the shared crises of the class challenges her subject position. As with all discourses in contact, the female student's perspective acknowledges that there is no easy or necessarily stable resolution—the discourses exist within her now and continue to be at play: "Somehow, though, I have managed to survive, whole and a bit fragmented at the same time; the same, but decidedly altered. Perhaps this final paper can only be testimony to that simple fact, that simple event" (*Testimony* 55). In this moment of self-awareness—of recognizing her role as a new addressor—she still manages to convey the affective impact of the experience, which informs her decision to limit her narrative to the personal. Due to the nature of her self-reflexive questioning, she avoids a disingenuous empathy. In *The Fragility of Empathy after the Holocaust*, Carolyn J. Dean discusses scholarly critiques of empathy where the boundaries between the self and other are "obliterated" (9). As Dean notes, "This discussion links disingenuous empathy to Enlightenment universalism, whose emphasis on our own likeness may erase our real differences in the interests of those gentiles who define the standard against which 'likeness' or 'difference' is measured" (11). While Felman's female Chinese student is connecting her identity discourses to that of

the Holocaust survivor, it is only through the mode of passing on testimony. In her self-reflection, she clearly holds on to her identity discourse but also acknowledges that other discourses are at play. Difference, here, is highlighted through the fact of her position as a relay of "that simple fact, that simple event." As inadequate as some may view that relay, it contains a power in addressing the transformation she feels.

The male student's response (Felman only identifies him as not Jewish) speaks to the importance of being addressed and the power for literature to convey memory, similar to Lyotard's resolution of the differend through narration. Unlike the previous excerpt from the female student, the male student begins by acknowledging the lack of connection he previously felt to the history of the Holocaust: "Viewing the Holocaust testimony was not for me initially catastrophic—so much of the historical coverage of it functions to empty it from its horror. Yet, in the week that followed the first screening, and throughout the remainder of the class, I felt increasingly implicated in the pain of the testimony, which found a particular reverberation in my own life" (*Testimony* 55-56). The concern Stone addresses about the normalizing impact of historicism is seen in the male student's writing; the lack of an emotional connection indicates a thin relationship with the memory of the Holocaust. Like the female student, the fact of feeling addressed through the videotaped testimony allows the student to develop a thick relationship with the survivors he watched. As his discourse comes into contact with those of the survivors, his perception of the Holocaust, and literature in general changes:

> Literature, as that which can sensitively bear witness to the Holocaust, gives me a voice, a right, and a necessity to survive. Yet, I cannot discount the literature which in the dark awakens the screams, which opens the wounds, and which makes me want to fall silent. Caught by two contradictory wishes at once, to speak or not to speak, I can only stammer. Literature, for me, in these moments, has had a performative value: my life has suffered a burden, undergone transference of pain. If I am to continue reading, I must, like David Copperfield, read *as if for life.* (*Testimony* 56)

Although he does not address the idea of collectivity as specifically as does the female student, the male student is clearly envisioning himself as connected to a larger group through the medium of literature, especially as it contains an essence of memory—of the lives affected by and lost during the Holocaust. That connection, which for both contains pain, transforms the discourses he sees himself participating in and thus his subjectivity. The male student also sees himself as continuing as an addressee in terms of his role as a reader. Yet, clearly he is also an addressor. While he sees his discourse as stammering, it is clear that it has an impact. After all, Felman herself moves from addressor of her students to the addressee of their trauma. This chapter, and even the whole of *Testimony* is motivated by her experience as an addressee: "And it was this crises which made this class unique in my experience, this crises which determined me to write about it, and which contained, in fact, the germ—and the germination—of this book"

(*Testimony* 47). The classes' crises, motivated by the thick relationship they developed with the testimonies, created an affect that addressed Felman, who becomes a new addressor through the writing of this text.

While Felman's class, which Felman herself labels as unique, is not representative of every individual's response to the Holocaust, it does allow us to begin conceptualizing an ethics that underscores intergenerational responses to the Holocaust. The way that this ethics appears, however, must be judged in a case-by-case scenario. In the male and female narratives that Felman includes in *Testimony*, we can see that the responses of the students are based on the interplay of the Holocaust discourses with the discourses that the students themselves bring into the liminal space in which they entered. While one can read connections between the two responses, there are substantial differences especially if one examines the influence of the ethnic identity contained in the female student's response. Allowing for these differences is essential. Just as no one Holocaust testimony can encompass the whole of people's experiences during the Holocaust, responses can take a myriad of forms based on the subject positions of the addressees and which addressors they connect with. In looking at how ethics develops through an intergenerational relay, one must consider how the responses seek to revivify the essence that informs a collective Holocaust memory.

One way in which we can view the passage of Holocaust discourse and the e/affective impact the narratives have on the addressee turned addressor is by examining the self-reflexive quality of the intergenerational responses. Self-reflexivity calls attention to the process of the relay as an addressee turns

addressor—the act of being addressed, of developing a relationship to the discourse, of moving into a liminal space in between discourses, and of emerging with new discourses. In his critic of historiography of the Holocaust, Stone emphasizes the postmodern approach of the self-reflexive text: "A self-reflexive text, in which the historian muses on the creation of the representation at the same time as the past is represented as history would immediately position the historian both textually and contextually within the debate in Holocaust studies" (43-44). By being placed within the debate, the historian cannot be viewed as an authority in the sense of speaking an absolute, objective view of history. As Lyotard notes, "And any attempt to state the law, for example, to place oneself in the position of enunciator of the universal prescription is obviously infatuation itself and absolute injustice, in point of fact" (*Just Playing* 99). By denying the impact of one's discourses on one's views of history, the historian can perpetrate injustice both on the subject matter and his/her readers. Instead, the self-reflexive nature that Stone advocates calls attention to the fact that the viewpoint is situational. Stone goes on to note:

> And, most importantly, the otherness of the past, its difference, while remaining the touchstone of historical writing, can, by situating the historian in relation to the events in the text, be the source of current unease, a means not of filing away the past, but of rendering it a continued issue for the present. In this way, historism truly fulfills its claim to be the study of change, and the

> Holocaust maintains its force to question the mores of the present. (Stone 44)

Given the various discourses that historians bring into play when writing their histories (as I previously noted in Stone's critique of German historiography) and the authority that readers grant to the idea of History, calling attention to the situational perspectives of history writers allows new generations to continue discussions about the meaning and impact of the Holocaust. In this way, intergenerational addressees can become part of the discussion—an openness that allows them to become part of a collective memory.

While Literature, by its nature, does not make the same claims about "truth" that History does (at least, in the types of authority that readers give to each respective genre), many intergenerational responses invoke self-reflexivity. Often, authors can have very complex relationships with the Holocaust; for Jewish writers, this can stem from the closeness (the thickness) of their relationship with the Holocaust. As Cynthia Ozick notes in an interview published in *The Atlantic*, "All the same, I'm against writing Holocaust fiction: that is, imagining those atrocities… I'm definitely on the side of sticking with the documents and am morally and emotionally opposed to the mythopoeticization of those events in any form or genre. And yet, for some reason, I keep writing Holocaust fiction. It is something that has happened to me; I can't help it. If I had been there and not here I would be dead, which is something I can never forget" (par. 20). On one level, Ozick's statement can be read as a concern about disingenuous empathy that negates the uniqueness of the Holocaust; at the same

moment, her comment about mythopoeticization invokes a concern that such narratives would be held as *the* representations of the Holocaust. And yet, she does write holocaust fiction. The contradictory emotions Ozick invokes (to speak or not to speak) calls attention to the unease underlying her writing—similar to the unease that Stone advocates as the means for making the discussion of the Holocaust a part of the present rather than solely of the past. In voicing contradictory discourses, Ozick calls attention to the fact that she is a relay, one who is passing on the affective essence of the Holocaust as she perceives it.

Ozick is certainly not alone in the move to self-reflexively call attention to the position of the author as part of a relay. In later chapters, I will be discussing the self-reflexive positioning other authors take in writing intergenerational responses to the Holocaust (Art Spiegelman as a second generation witness, Joseph Skibell as a fourth generation witness, and Jonathan Safran Foer as a third generation witness). At this moment, I would like to explore a self-reflexive text that comes out of Israel, David Grossman's *See Under: Love*, that offers a complex view of self-reflexivity through its use of Postmodern narrative strategies, especially metafiction. In including a brief discussion of Grossman's work here, I am not inferring that the concerns belonging to Jewish communities in Israel are the same as they are in America. Instead, I want to illustrate how the impetus for collective memory and the relaying of cultural discourse are similar between various authors who have thick relationships to the memory of the Holocaust. Throughout much of the surreal novel, the writer/protagonist, Momik Wasserman (readers are invited to conflate Momik with Grossman as author

through the switch to the "I" that occurs in the chapter labeled *Bruno*), calls attention to his unease with writing, which often results in his inability to write. Yet the protagonist is haunted by his relationship with his grandfather's brother, Anshel Wasserman (who Momik calls Grandfather), a Holocaust survivor and, before the war, a children's author who lived with his family.[7] Even when he becomes a fish, he cannot escape the Anshel's story:

> "Do you by any chance know the story Anshel Wasserman told the German called Neigel?"
>
> Bruno swiveled a gill and shut his eyes with concentration. "It's a fabulous story, oh yes," he said, and his strange face lit up. "Only there's…ha! The devil take it! I've forgotten!" And with a smile, as though remembering suddenly, he added, "But of course! That was the essence of his story, Shloma, you forget it and you have to recall it afresh every time!"
>
> "And someone who never knew it, had never heard it in his life, remember it?"
>
> "Just as a person remembers his name. His destiny. His heart. No, my Shloma, there is no one who doesn't know that story." (Grossman 181)

This moment is important for Momik, since it gives him the motivation to return to land and to write Anshel's story. It also invokes the idea of collective memory through the retelling of narratives. Even though the original story is forgotten, the

essence of it remains in each retelling of the story. Anshel's story belongs to the collective memory.

In the last two sections of the text, *Wasserman* and *the Complete Encyclopedia of Kazik's Life* respectively, metafiction and the act of writing lead to revivification not just of Anshel's story but Anshel himself. In the text, Grossman presents the idea of a white room, a liminal space in which Momik as writer connects with Anshel. In the final two sections of the text, there exists multiple levels—the narration of Anshel telling a story to the head of the concentration camp, Niegel; Anshel talking to Momik about the process of writing, and the characters of Anshel's story speaking as well. Here, Anshel guides Momik's story so that Niegel is forced to recognize the humanity of the people he is brutally killing…and take his own life. In doing so, Momik is faced with writing about and killing a baby in the space of a day; since the various levels, at play with each other, brings to life the essence of the characters, Momik becomes horrified at what he must to the baby. He tries to leave the white room:

> I stood up and wanted to leave the White Room. There was nothing left to look for. I had forgotten the language spoken there. But I couldn't find the door. That is, I touched the walls, I walked all the way around the room, but there was no door. The walls were smooth. But there had to be a door!
>
> And Anshel Wasserman comes in and faces me. As before. Bowed, hunchbacked. His skin yellow and sagging. He wants to show me the way out. He knows the way. All his life he has been

> lost in this forest, scattering crumbs of words to help him find the way out. The man from the fairy tales, Anshel Wasserman-Scheherazade. (Grossman 297)[8]

In this passage, one can see the White Room as a liminal space, defined by discourses in contact: Momik, who does not want to go on with the tale, and Anshel's, who is pushing the narration down a path where Niegel must confront the humanity of his victims. The story is fragmented with words scattered about. The only way that Momik can work his way through is to write a new discourse:

> "Grandfather?"
>
> "Write about the baby, Shleimeleh. Write about his life."
>
> "I want to get out of here. The White Room scares me."
>
> "The whole world is the White Room. Come walk with me."
>
> "I'm afraid."
>
> "So am I. Write about the baby, Shleimeleh."
>
> "No!!!"
>
> I screamed and threw off the soft, warm hand where the story streamed in torrents. I flung myself against the smooth white walls, across the pages of my notebook, at the mirror, at my soul—there was no way out. Everything was blocked.
>
> "Write then," said Anshel Wasserman patiently, gently. "Sit and write. There is no other way. Because you are like me,

> your life is the story, and for you there is only the story. Write, then, please." (Grossman 297)

It is only through the act of writing that the differend, which exists between Momik's and Anshel's respective discourses, can be resolved and a new narration created. The essence of Anshel is revivified through the collective memory invoked by the multiple levels Grossman is employing in the latter sections of the text. In the same moment, the reader is aware of the author's agency in writing; by using the "I" and conflating the protagonist Momik with himself, Grossman as author, Grossman employs a pseudo-autobiographical move that calls the readers attention to the writing of the book. In this way, the reader becomes aware of how he or she is situated as an addressee in relation to the multiple discourses at play in the text.

Through Grossman's text, one can see how the self-reflexive characteristic of the metafictional strategy he employs fulfills a range of characteristics laid out through my exploration of ethics and intergenerational memory. In the text, a thick relationship based on Anshel's presence and participation in the text is created that allows the intergenerational addressee to come into contact with the discourse of the Holocaust. In Grossman's case, one can see the intergenerational addressee as Grossman himself, invoked by the pseudo-autobiographical style of the "I." Despite the unwillingness to write, knowing that it will lead to the premature death of the baby (and Neigel's suicide), the author is compelled to write. The thickness of his relationship to Anshel manifests itself through his participation in the act of writing. To be just

to Anshel, Momik/Grossman must complete the story. It is the only way for him to work through the conflict between his discourse and Anshel's; until there is resolution, Momik/Grossman cannot leave the White Room. Yet, the metafictional style also forces the reader to be aware of the action of writing itself, a move that breaks the boundaries between text and reader, thus allowing for the probability of the reader feeling addressed by the discourses at play—an act that emphasizes the fact that collective memory needs to expand beyond the boundaries of any given text. The text is a relay. Grossman positions himself as addressee turned addressor through his fictional depiction of the process of becoming a relay. Thus, he works to ensure that this cultural discourse is transmitted while calling attention to his discourse position—a function of the text's affective purpose. The choice for authors to employ self-reflexive modes of discourse calls attention to the fact that the discourse of the Holocaust is mediated by other discourses that intergenerational witnesses automatically bring into play by the nature their subject positions. In this way, they call attention to the fact that their perspectives are not universal. Rather, one sees what Holocaust discourse means to them—a position that puts them into the debate that is essential in the continued transmission of collective memory.

The impetus for revivification of the essence for those who suffered and died during the Holocaust is understandable for the authors I am discussing in the later chapters of this text; three of the authors (Spiegelman, Skibell, and Foer) are connected through family ties, one (Edward Lewis Wallant) through his status as a Jewish American writer. The authors with family ties tend to employ various

self-reflexive modes (as I will be discussing in each respective chapter). Yet, when one speaks of the essence of Holocaust discourse, the question, "How could this have happened?" is haunting…especially as it is paired with "Never Again." This forces one to look at the nature of the perpetrators. Immediately post war, the desire to abject the actions/motivations of the Nazis from the rest of the category of "humanity" and more specifically from Western civilization manifests in an Othering of the Nazis:

> Nevertheless, the desire of the Nuremberg prosecutors to create a better world, but without having to question too closely the characteristics of the old, necessitated formulations such as Jackson's ['It is not because they yielded to the normal frailties of human beings that we accuse them. It is their abnormal and inhuman conduct which brings them to this bar']. Unfortunately, these formulations reiterated the same charge against the Nazis—that they were not human—that the Nazis used against the Jews. (Stone 104)

Just as the realization of the humanity of his victims forces Niegel in *See Under: Love* to confront the immorality of his actions, a similar understanding of the Nazis as human beings offers challenges in understanding the nature of evil within ourselves. As Susan Neiman in *Evil in Modern Thought* notes, "A more common way to deny the significance of Auschwitz combines a completely secular vocabulary with a curiously theological structure. While the first view regards Nazis as one more variation in the long history of anti-Semitism, the

second views them as singularly demonic. On this view, Auschwitz reveals much about one nation in particular but nothing about humanity in general" (254).[9] Understanding the Nazis and their actions as undeniably human certainly did not coincide with the desire of the Allied countries to see themselves as "good triumphing over evil." Yet, the idea of the Nazis as a sort of metaphysical evil (and certainly a sign of such evil) is common in popular culture.

While we can look at the Nuremberg trials as one possible source for the view of Nazis as metaphysical evil, Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, offers another understanding of why the Holocaust happened and what it means for humanity. When Eichmann was captured and brought to trial in Israel, many received the news as a sign of justice; one of the individuals in a major position of power was finally going to face his crimes. The trial, however, revealed to Arendt the underlying flaw to this perspective. The Holocaust, in its magnitude, could not have occurred had not a large number of average people allowed it to happen. For Arendt, Eichmann represented the common not the fantastic: "The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that many were neither perverted or sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal" (Arendt 276). In reporting on Eichmann's trial, Arendt realized that despite the attempts of the prosecution to prove otherwise, she could not help feeling that she was facing a very average sort of person. As Neiman notes:

> Criminals like Eichmann have none of the subjective traits we use to identify evildoers, yet his crimes were so objectively massive

> that they made subjective factors irrelevant. His attempts to prove he was completely normal were as arduous as the prosecution's attempt to prove that he was not. Both attempts are wasted, if what's at issue is what's appalling: the most unprecedented crimes can be committed by ordinary people. (273)

The perception of Eichmann's normalcy forced Arendt to reconceptualize her discourse about humanity's relationship to Evil. If Eichmann was a normal person and his motivations were trivially average, than great Evil did not need to be a sign of the metaphysical—it could be (and was) simply banal.

Like many Nazi officers, Eichmann noted that there seemed to be no widespread critique of the Nazis' Final Solution. Arendt notes, "As Eichmann told it, the most potent factor in the soothing of his own conscience was the simple fact that he could see no one, no one at all, who actually was against the Final Solution" (116). The very fact that there seemed to be no critique allowed Eichmann to disregard the morality of his organization of mass deportations. He was more conscious of trivial concerns like getting promoted rather than the reality of what his job meant in terms of committing genocide (although the fact that many Nazi officials worried about what would happen if Germany lost the war indicates that they were not unaware of how other nations would perceive the Final Solution…and how they would be punished if they were caught). Yet, because Eichmann's relationship with his victims was thin, morality lost to indifference.

Arendt's conceptualization of the Banality of Evil does not focus on Eichmann alone; his comment about seeing no one against the Final Solution implicates a much larger population as responsible for the Holocaust:

> Many Germans and many Nazis, probably an overwhelming majority of them, must have been tempted *not* to murder, *not* to rob, *not* to let their neighbors go off to their doom (for that the Jews were transported to their doom they knew, of course, even though many of them may not have known the gruesome details), and not to become accomplices in all these crimes by benefiting from them.
>
> But, God knows, they had learned how to resist the temptation. (Arendt 150)

The irrevocable fact that had there been widespread protest (on the part of the Germans, the Polish, the French, etc.), the Holocaust might have not been so extreme a limit experience nor would so many have perished, indicates widespread complicity. Even though the Final Solution was against many people's morals, they overwhelmingly failed to act. Arendt also extends this critique to the victims themselves by noting "Without Jewish help in administrative and police work—the final rounding up of Jews in Berlin was, as I mentioned, done entirely by Jewish police—there would have been either complete chaos or an impossibly severe drain on German manpower" (Arendt 117). For many who read Arendt's work, the idea of blaming the victims of mass atrocity is hard to bear. First generation witnesses address this critique by noting

the "choiceless choices" one made, especially in a situation where survival was often completely arbitrary. While such a reading certainly underlines Israel's conceptualization of itself as a state, many intergenerational responses focus more on the role of the perpetrators as a means to ensure the call of "Never Again."

In *Evil in Modern Thought*, Neiman focuses on Auschwitz as the event that changed how society conceptualized evil. In the past, society tended to conceptualize Evil in metaphysical terms; Auschwitz challenges that perception:

> It's easy to see that evil will is absent in things like earthquakes, but what did it mean for evil to be present in humankind? Auschwitz stood for moral evil as other war crimes did not because it seemed deliberate as others did not. Sending children to fight for Britain in the mud of Flanders without grasping the power of the weapons you have put in their hands can be called gross criminal negligence. Rounding up children from all ends of Europe and shipping them to gas chambers in Poland cannot. (Neiman 270)[10]

Here, Neiman argues that the fact that the scale of the genocide represented in the Holocaust employed detailed planning and the use of a bureaucratic structure, means that we must face the Holocaust as a deliberate action that is in no way natural. Nor can it be assigned to a supernatural power: "Arendt's account was crucial in revealing what makes Auschwitz emblematic for contemporary evil. It showed that today, even crimes so immense that the earth itself cries out for retribution are committed by people with motives that are no worse than banal" (Neiman 273). The combination of the deliberation of some with the widespread

indifference of many is, as Margalit notes, a lethal combination. The fact that the Holocaust challenges metanarratives such as Progressivism indicates a new mode of understanding Evil. It does not mean, however, that humanity is completely free of older conceptualizations of Evil: "It is just this identification of evil with evil intention that lead to a widespread misreading of Arendt. Because she argues that Eichmann's intentions were only trivially bad ones, she was held to have argued that his actions were nothing worse. Her point was not to deny responsibility but to demand that we understand responsibility anew" (Neiman 277). In looking at Evil as a metaphysical force, one does not need to take responsibility. After all, what power do we have when faced with events that we ascribe to a supernatural force such as God or Satan? Understanding how and why the Holocaust reached the scale it did offers a contradictory discourse—one that requires us to examine the nature of our own humanity.

For Arendt, this questioning of the nature of evil forced her to rethink the nature of goodness. The problem at the heart of the Banality of Evil is how easy it is to ignore the thin relationships we have with others. Warren Zev Harvey, in "Two Approaches to Evil in History," quotes an excerpt from Arendt's correspondence with Gershom Scholem:

> "You are quite right: I changed my mind and do no longer speak of 'radical evil.'…It is indeed my opinion now that evil is never 'radical,' that it is only extreme, and that is possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension. It can grow and lay waste the whole world precisely because it spreads like a fungus on the surface. It

> is ‘thought defying’…because thought tries to reach some depth, to go to the roots, and the moment it concerns itself with evil, it is frustrated because there is nothing. That is its ‘banality.’ Only the good has depth and can be radical.” (331)

The insidious nature of the Banality of Evil lies in the fact that humanity wants to abject that aspect of ourselves—to Other it—so that we do not have to address it. While this makes for a positive subjective discourse, it is not an honest one. In examining the essence of the Holocaust, we must ask if and how the intergenerational narrative e/affectively incorporates the Banality of Evil as part of the cultural discourse that is transmitted.

As the discussion on the Banality of Evil gained more cultural currency, authors began to address that concept in their own work. Harvey notes that the concern with how texts represent Evil in the context of the Holocaust led to self-examination by first generation witnesses: “It was a desire to restrain the mythical interpretation of the Holocaust that in recent years led the survivor-author Ka tzetnik to question his own powerful and unforgettable description of ‘the planet Auschwitz,’ whose laws differ from those on our planet. Auschwitz, he now stressed, was run by human beings, not Satan, and was located here on earth” (Harvey 331). The discourse of the Holocaust presents challenges of representation, especially as it comes into play with other discourses. Yet, it is important that those challenges be met. In his analysis of Maimonidean versus kabbalistic approaches to the Holocaust, Harvey privileges the Maimonidean since this discourse forces one to look at the role of humanity: “As opposed to the

kabbalistic approach, the Maimonidean one begins with the fact that the evils of the Holocaust were perpetrated by human beings against human beings. It seeks to understand the psychological and political causes of those evils, that is, to identify the privations of knowledge that made them possible. To understand how the Holocaust came about is to understand how a future Holocaust can be prevented (Harvey 330-1). While invoking Jewish religious practices often meets resistance based on the desire not to center Judaism on the Holocaust, it is clear that Harvey is exploring discourses that allow for the recognition of the very human nature of the banality of Evil. As Amos Funkenstein notes,

> If, however, we turn from God to man, the Holocaust is neither incomprehensible nor meaningless. It was neither bestial nor indeed pagan. It was, instead, an eminently human event in that it demonstrated those extremes, which *only* man and his society are capable of doing or suffering. It pointed at a possibility, perhaps unknown before, of human existence, a possibility as human as the best instances of creativity and compassion. (647)

Since the possibility for evil based solely on indifference is as much a part of humanity as our best ideals, the depth of the choice to be good becomes clear. Both evil and goodness make up our inherent nature; the problem is that the selfishness of our nature—the instinct for comfort, security, survival—means that we often take the safe road. In order to be good, we must find ways to address that impulse. An intergenerational discourse that fails to recognize the humanity of evil opens up the possibility for atrocity.

In exploring the intergenerational narratives in the later sections of my text, I will be focusing on the essence of the Holocaust both in terms of the thick relationships the authors embody to those who experienced the Holocaust and the way they address the Banality of Evil. American national discourse about the Holocaust, on a basic level, allows for both modes of criteria as Mariam Niroumand notes in the '*Americanization' of the Holocaust* through an excerpt from a speech made by Jimmy Carter in April 1979, "'Secondly, however, we must share the responsibility for not being willing to acknowledge forty years ago that this horrible event was occurring'" (61). Here, President Carter is only acknowledging a small portion of what Americans take responsibility for during the Holocaust. Now, we recognize that we contributed to the mass genocide by not taking in refugees and by failing to attack the infrastructure that allowed so many Jews (and members of other groups) to be transported to their deaths. Yet, even in taking this amount of blame, it is a fairly safe discourse. After all, Americans were not Nazis. We liberated the camps and stopped Hitler. Yet, such discourse fails to grasp the essence of Holocaust discourse. If our goal is truly "Never Again," than the intergenerational discourses that we create must seriously explore how we place ourselves in the larger debate of the Holocaust through its affective relay of the essence of the Holocaust.

Notes:

[1]Gary Weissman addresses implications of this stance in *Fantasies of Witnessing: Postwar Efforts to Experience the Holocaust*: "Those who claim that the Holocaust is unrepresentable effectively demand a degree of fidelity to the past that is impossible to realize, as it would ultimately require a representation to *be* the reality that it represents, and to have the same effect on readers and viewers that past events had on those who were there" (208).

[2]As Dan Stone, in *Constructing the Holocaust*, notes, the weight given to factual testimony during the Nuremburg Trials led to a reliance on Nazi documentation "at the expense of the experiences of Jews and other victims" (5). While this choice can fairly be characterized as problematic at the time (given the Nazi's use of euphemisms, the destruction of documentation as the end of the war approached, etc), Stone critiques this choice since it also dictated how early historians approached the Holocaust.

[3]Rosenblat's *Angel at the Fence*, which he claimed was the story of meeting his future wife while a prisoner at Buchenwald, was initially scheduled for release by Berkley Books in Feb. 2009. Rosenblat's story got a great deal of publicity, including from Oprah Winfrey, until the veracity of the love story was questioned (Rosenblat is a Holocaust survivor but the main part of the story about his wife helping him to survive by passing food to him through the camp fence was untrue). I would argue "perceived damage" but fully acknowledge that the position is based on my perspective as one who does not question "the event" itself. In another's hands, the claim of truthfulness made by these authors and others I have not mentioned here, could be used as a tool for revisionist rhetoric.

[4]One example can be seen in the mediocre 2008 movie, *The Spirit* by Frank Miller where Samuel Jackson's character of The Octopus dresses as a Nazi—an appropriation that focuses more on power and, in the context of the film, the idea of the "Super Man." While this is only one of many examples, the fact that the image of the Nazi appears throughout popular culture in ways that de-emphasize the Holocaust means that the discourses many young people take into this liminal space can fail to connect to the factual first generation accounts.

[5]Felman's class, "Literature and Testimony," was a graduate seminar at Yale (*Testimony* 6).

[6] "Or project of characterizing moral witnesses seems to go against the scientific trend of shifting the emphasis from personal authority of the witness to the evidence itself. While we do not invest the moral witness with traditional authority, we seem to endow him with a special sort of charisma. The charisma comes from having a special kind of experience which is elevated to some sort of high spirituality that makes the witness a moral force" (Margalit 178).

[7]The story of Momik and Anshel Wasserman makes up the first section of the text, named *Momik*. In this part, Anshel tells Momik of his experience in the Holocaust but, because of his family's silence on or cryptic references to the Holocaust, Momik does not fully understand the Holocaust experiences he hears.

[8]In Grossman's text, Anshel is described as a reverse Scheherazade. Anshel cannot die (no matter how many times the Nazi try to kill him) but longs for death as an escape from the camp. Anshel strikes a deal with Niegel that Anshel will tell him part of the story each night if Niegel promises to try to kill him at the end of each part.

[9]Neiman uses Auschwitz as a representative term for the Holocaust (253).

[10]In particular, Neiman focuses on the earthquake of 1755 that destroyed the city of Lisbon (1).

CHAPTER 3

IN SPEAKING YOUR STORY, I AM TELLING MINE:

THE TRANSITIONS BETWEEN AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND BIOGRAPHY IN ART SPIEGELMAN'S *MAUS I & II*

> But above all I am the one who saw his grandmother go to heaven. Like a flame, she chased away the sun and took its place. And this new sun which blinds instead of giving light forces me to walk with my head down. It weighs upon the future of man. It casts a gloom over the hearts and vision of generations to come…
>
> I told her: as a child I lived with the perpetual fear of forgetting my mother's name after I died. In school my teacher had told me: three days after your funeral, an angel will come and knock on your grave. He'll ask you your name. You will answer. "I am Eliezer, the son of Sarah." Woe if you forget! A dead soul, you will remain buried for all eternity… You will be condemned to wander the sphere of chaos where nothing exists, neither punishment nor pain, neither justice nor injustice, neither past or future, neither hope nor despair. It is a serious thing to forget your mother's name. It is like forgetting your own origin.
>
> -Elie Wiesel, *The Accident*

It is impossible to fully understand the effects of the Holocaust upon those who experienced it; the separation from that experience by time, by geography, by various other discourses all impact how Holocaust discourse is processed intergenerationally. For those of us who access the memories of Holocaust survivors through oral histories or written texts—even in our recognition that the essence of Holocaust memory needs revivification—the initial thinness of our relationship to first generation Holocaust witnesses can impact how Holocaust discourse addresses us. To establish a thick relationship, there must be a willingness on the part of the addressee to allow Holocaust discourse to affect our initial discourses as we move through the liminal space of contact between

discourses. For the children of Holocaust survivors, their connection is different; while they do not hold the discourse of the Holocaust the way their parents do, it is impossible for them not to develop a thick relationship with the Holocaust because of their connection to their parents. Certainly this is true of Art Spiegelman, the author of *Maus I & II*. Through his two structural narratives (biography and autobiography), Spiegelman explores his personal relationship to the Holocaust. On one level, these texts are the recording of Vladek Spiegelman's experiences during the Holocaust—a biography of Spiegelman's father. On another level, the texts function as autobiography as Spiegelman tries to come to terms with his father's memories, his mother's suicide, and his Jewish identity—a visual depiction of liminality as he works through his intergenerational contact with the Holocaust discourse of his father. In *Maus I*, Spiegelman's construction of himself through his text is subtle; masked by the role of recorder, the focus seems to be on his father's memories before the camps. In *Maus II*, the transitions to autobiography are more pronounced as Spiegelman self-reflexively calls attention to his role as the artist and recorder (addressor) of his father's—his culture's—discourses. The autobiography, split as it is into three "I"s of self, author, and narrator (the last of which is split into an adult/child duality) is fundamentally Spiegelman's public act of dealing with the trauma of the Holocaust as it affected his family; it is this focus of the autobiography within biography that forces the recognition the thick relationship that guides Spiegelman through liminality as he moves from the position of addressee to addressor as a relay of the essence of Holocaust discourse.[1]

In categorizing *Maus I & II* as an autobiography, it is important to clarify precisely what role the autobiographical sections of the texts play in terms of understanding Spiegelman the author, the narrator, and the self. Indeed, there is some resistance to naming these texts as autobiography. For instance, Dominick LaCapra resists the automatic assumption that the fictional Artie can be easily connected with Spiegelman the man (self):

> It is important to insist that Spiegelman and the Artie-figure cannot simply be conflated; there is a complex relation of proximity and distance between the two. In this sense it would be misleading to see the text as simply autobiographical or even as a form of cooperative autobiography. It is clear from comments in interviews that Spiegelman did not fully identify with Artie and intentionally created ways in which Artie would not appear as a fully sympathetic character or object of transferential identification for the reader. (*History* 153)

The fact that Spiegelman does not fully relate to Artie does not necessarily mean that this text is not autobiographical; LaCapra's caution against an easy conflation of the self within to the self outside the text in the midst of an abundance of criticism that clearly accepts the texts as representations of Spiegelman's life marks the complicated roles—multiple "I"s—that are invoked in the autobiographical pact of the text.[2]

The confusion of labels (including the initial controversy concerning *Maus* being labeled as fiction) illustrates to some extent the trickster role that

Spiegelman plays with the text and the reader. While inferring a clear differentiation between himself and the character he creates in interviews like that which LaCapra notes, Spiegelman also emphasizes the connection between Artie within the text to Art, the man outside of the text, by releasing audio tapes of his interviews with his father in the CDRom version of *Maus* in 1994. These recordings connect the visual depiction of "Artie" the narrator with the man "Art," who lives outside of the text. How then are we to understand the elements of *Maus* that seem to be autobiographical? In other essays that focus on autobiography, critics seem to use the theoretical convention of autobiography that differentiates between the roles that the "I" plays. Nancy Miller critiques the separation of narrator and author she sees in Ethan Mordenn's work: "The man in the mouse mask is precisely the figure of the *son as the artist*" (48). Michael Levine notes a similar structure in his discussion of the relationship between Vladek and Art: "Although Art as a character appears to be taken in by Vladek's ruse, Spiegelman the artist uses the scene to introduce the figure of the smoke screen as a key to the structural principle of displacement operative in the text" (80). Both critics emphasize two roles: the narrator within the text and the author/self outside. This complicated reading of the autobiography within *Maus*, however, still cannot fully account for a situation where the self outside of the text does not like the narrator self within the text that the author self created.

It is at this point that Lejeune's model for the autobiographical pact allows for a critical framework in which the complexities of the multiple selves (connected with three distinct roles) can be understood. In reference to the name

printed on the cover, the reader understands the various "I"s within a text to represent that name which stands for a real person (Lejeune 11). Within the autobiographical pact, various "I"s appear that are produced because of the roles they play in the text. In terms of the larger question of whether Maus can be read as autobiographical, it is important to look at the three different, un-unified "I"s of an autobiographical text: the "I" as the self (Art) who is active, experiencing, living; the "I" as the narrator (Artie) who is self-reflexive, remembering, observing; and the "I" as the author (Spiegelman) who is creative, interpretive, entextualizing. The "I" of self that Spiegelman exposes in the text is limited to the self in relationship to the discourses of the Holocaust and his Jewish-American identity. This self is clearly separated from the "I" of the author (artist) who creates a narrator who is intentionally unlikable at times (as LaCapra notes). The last "I," that of the narrator, is an intentional construction of the artist. In an effort to articulate the "I" of the self who is the *child* of survivors, the author/artist splits the "I" of the narrator into an adult/child dualistic image. None of these "I"s come together in autobiography as a unified whole; none of these come together in *Maus I & II* to give the reader an idea of Spiegelman as a complete subject. Rather, the focus of the autobiographical nature of these texts lies within Spiegelman's attempts to come to terms with his family's history, his personal trauma, as it relates specifically to the memory of the Holocaust; by working out the trauma in a public form, Spiegelman allows himself the opportunity of expressing rather than suppressing his trauma.[3] The fragmented discourse created by the multiple levels of "I" at play in the text highlights the process of liminality

that Spiegelman is working through in his very personal, thick role as addressee to his father's Holocaust discourse. *Maus I & II* addresses Spiegelman's personal trauma rather than a recounting of truth—especially of a true self; the autobiographical focus of the multiple "I"s is an act of resistance to the pain of the Holocaust.[4] The duality of the adult/child split within the narrative "I" indicates Art's attempt to work through trauma, specifically in relation to the 'I" of the self as a second-generation survivor. Given that these texts always operate in relation to the Holocaust, it is useful to see *Maus I & II* as Spiegelman's attempt to come to terms with the memory through the creative medium of an autobiographical narrative that is composed of both text and visual images in the form of highly sophisticated comic books.

Even though the project begins with Spiegelman as a grown man, the viewpoint of the text is controlled by his position as a child of survivors. One of the subtexts throughout *Maus I & II* is the child's perspective. This does not mean that Spiegelman is trying to make the texts childlike; he is, however, always referencing his role as a child: in relation to his parents and in his relation to the history of the Holocaust itself. The form of these texts, the comic book, is in itself a reference to the controlling theme of being a child, a distanced witness to the Holocaust. The traditional view of the genre of comic books as a genre for children is played upon by Spiegelman as he breaks the traditional conventions associated with comic books (as fun, fantasy, and unrealistic) and transforms the genre into a medium of horrific memory. As Joseph Witek notes, "Serious literature in comic-book form is a relatively recent and slightly unsettling concept

in American culture, but a comic book which takes on the Holocaust as a subject compounds the problem of artistic decorum a hundredfold" (97). The complications of this choice are evident in the criticism that has surrounded this text; many feel that the form is inappropriate for the subject matter. In Witek's study, *Comic Books as History*, he notes resistance to *Maus* is coupled with an overall opposition to any form that aestheticizes the Holocaust (97). However, the controversy over these texts is compounded particularly by the form itself: "In a society which views comic books as *essentially* trivial, *Maus* thus might appear as a grotesque degradation of the Holocaust, mocking the catastrophic sufferings of millions of human beings as the squirming of cartoon rodents" (Witek 97). Both points are not lost on Spiegelman who, in *Maus II*, illustrates this dilemma of representation and form when he depicts himself drawing at a desk that rests upon the dead, emaciated bodies of the mice, which are his visual representation of Jews (41). Spiegelman also notes, "I need to show the events and memory of the Holocaust without showing them. I want to show the masking of these events *in* their representation" (Young 222). The theme of masking works on multiple levels (which will be discussed in detail later) but the idea of showing these events "without showing them" is significant in this discussion of the genre. The comic book allows Spiegelman to illustrate the role of "race" (race as a discourse of ideological fiction) through the various characterizations of Jews as Mice, Germans as cats, etc. The illustration of the texts indicates a simplified perspective; the author/artist is visually limiting the "I" of the self through the

construction of the "I" of the narrator as a symbol of Jewish identity—the depiction of a mouse.[5]

The comic book form also serves another function that is implied throughout the texts: Art Spiegelman's dual role as both an adult artist and as a child of Holocaust survivors. In *Maus II*, Spiegelman focuses upon his role as intergenerational addressee in relationship to the Holocaust as he reflects upon the acclaim given to him after the publication of *Maus I*. When Spiegelman depicts the scene concerning the publicity/marketing of *Maus I*, he transforms Artie from the adult artist (wearing a mask of Jewish identity, a mouse) to a child in search/need of his mother. This transformation from adult to child remains as Artie goes to his psychiatrist, Pavel, who is also another survivor of the Holocaust. As Artie talks to Pavel, he is trying to come to grips with his success and his parent's history: "No matter what I accomplish, it doesn't seem like much compared to surviving Auschwitz" (*Maus II* 44). In this moment, the "I" of the self merges with the questioning of the artist through the words of the narrator; the autobiographical subject is present. This statement, as it reflects other statements made by the children of survivors, specifically recalls his discourse as a child to that history and to his parents: "And any victory of my own paled before what they had achieved. When I became aware of myself, I began to wonder whether I, in the same circumstances, would have survived" (Mostysser 7). This connection to other children of survivors illustrates the ways in which Spiegelman's self-reflexive panel constructs an identity discourse of himself in relationship to the Holocaust discourse of his parents. The link to other second-

generation survivors is further emphasized by the fact that the visual depiction of Artie is as a child. In the act of illustrating his history, the author/artist depicts the narrative "I" as a child—a reference to both being a child of survivors and childlike in the face of the overpowering memories of the Holocaust. It is not until after he has left the psychiatrist that Artie again becomes the adult artist. This artistic shift reflects the interpretation of the narrative "I" in terms of the adult/child duality.

The form of the comic book and the choice to draw these characters also reflects the bifurcated identity of Spiegelman as adult and child through the deceptive simplicity of the form. The actual drawings of the mice are basically simple outlines of the form; Spiegelman generally does not use a lot of shading to give his characters "life." Instead, the visual depictions of the mice are minimized with a few details to give them expressions. This references the child theme of the texts since simplicity is generally associated with children. Yet, Spiegelman will break into this visual occasionally with frames that are very detailed like the one depicting Auschwitz at the end of *Maus I* (157). In this frame, the scenery at the gate to Auschwitz is illustrated with a lot of detail: the gate itself appears with the inscription, "Arbeit Macht Frei," the train cars are shadowed, a vicious dog is caught in mid-jump in the foreground, and the guards (with their cat faces) look particularly dark and menacing, The detailed frame illustrates the complexity of this art form and undermines the simplicity that is generally associated with the genre of comic books. If simplicity is a reference to childishness, then the complexity of the images combined with the fact that the

passages often occur at transitional moments like entering Auschwitz indicates adult sophistication through the interpretation of the artistic self. Thus, the illustrations are not "trivial," but form a visual framework in which to understand Spiegelman's construction of an (child/adult) intergenerational relationship to the Holocaust.

For the most part, *Maus I* tends to focus on the biography of Vladek Spiegelman; throughout most of the text, Spiegelman visually/textually emphasizes Artie's role as recorder/interviewer. There are, however, several clues that indicate that this is not just Vladek's story: it is also the story of Art's intergenerational development and coming to terms with his subjectivity as a child of the Holocaust. *Maus I* begins with a vignette of Art's childhood. As he roller-skates with his friends, Artie's skate comes loose and he falls; his friends, rather than waiting for him, skate off calling him "Rotten Egg" (*Maus I* 5). Artie turns to his father for comfort, explaining that his friends have left him. Vladek responds, "Friends? Your friends? If you lock them together in a room with no food for a week…Then you could see what it is, Friends!" (*Maus I* 6). This depiction, which occurs as an introduction to the text, indicates the effects that Holocaust discourse has on the Spiegelmans' family dynamics: Artie comes searching for sympathy and Vladek, rather than giving that sympathy, compares the fact that Artie's friends left him after he fell with his own horrific memories. Vladek's inability to give sympathy to his son is not unusual for Holocaust survivors: "For severely depressed survivors, a preoccupation with anger and experienced losses diminished their ability to empathize and help with the

problems of their children" (Haas 94). In this scene, Spiegelman is setting up the autobiographical aspect of his work in terms of coming to grips with being a child of survivors. The focus of this text is not only telling Vladek's story and thereby ensuring its memory; it is also Spiegelman's attempt to illustrate the psychological effects of the memory of the Holocaust on himself.

Even the depiction of Artie as a recorder of his father's memories is double-voiced; certainly the act of recording comprises one aspect of his role within this project, yet, it is clear that Spiegelman is seeking, within his father's story, to tell his own. The texts reflect both voices, even when the focus is upon Vladek's biography: "The omnipresent tape recorder—mediating between Art and Vladek, Art and his artistry, Art and the reader—accompanies the telling from beginning to end" (Horowitz 281). Since the biography—Vladek's testimony of the Holocaust—provides the focus for Spiegelman's attempt to come to terms with his role as a second-generation witness, the tape recording of Vladek's memories speaks also of Spiegelman's role as author (the one who entextualizes) and as Artie the narrator (the one who observes and articulates experience).

Maus I, in particular, focuses upon Artie talking with his father about his memories about the Holocaust, with an emphasis on the period before both of his parents arrive at Auschwitz. On the surface of the text, there are clear markers between the autobiographical and the biographical; when Spiegelman deviates from the recounting of Vladek's memories, the insertions of self are very clear. Spiegelman notes that these movements in the text are meant to break up the metaphor of Jews as mice:

> I wanted it to become problematic, to have it confound and implicate the reader. I include all sorts of paradoxes in the text—for instance, the way in which Artie, the mouse cartoonist, draws the story of his mother's suicide, and in his strip (my own *Hell Planet* strip) all the characters are human. All those movements are meant to rupture the metaphor, to render its absurdity conspicuous, to force a kind of free fall. (Feinstein 246)

The use of paradoxes, of rupturing the representation (and Spiegelman's characterization of that as a "free fall") indicates the sense of liminality that exists throughout the texts. *Maus I & II* are not meant to be read as a stable construction of a unified discourse. Just as the interweaving of biography and autobiography represents intergenerational contact between discourses, the breaking up of the imagery within the text forces Spiegelman's addressees (us as readers) to become aware of the essence at the heart of these discourses—that they represent very real people.

While the comic clearly exposes the artificiality of the choice to depict Jews as mice by simultaneously presenting passages that serve to remind the reader that these characters are human, the insertion of Spiegelman's previously published comic, *Prisoner on the Hell Planet*, clearly shifts the perspective away from Vladek's telling of the story to Spiegelman's autobiographical emotions about his mother's suicide, specifically his guilt. In *Children of Job*, Alan L. Berger sees this autobiographical passage as "a powerful portrayal of the nature of second-generation guilt" (65). Berger delineates the dynamics of second

generation guilt in specific ways that differ from those who witnessed the Holocaust:

> This guilt needs, however, to be distinguished from the phenomenon of survivor guilt. Among second-generation witnesses, guilt arises from several sources. For example, many feel guilty for not having been in the *Shoah*. Others feel guilt, quite undeservedly, for the fact that their parents suffered during the Holocaust. Still others feel a sense of guilt for not being able to comprehend the meaning of their parents' suffering and their own Holocaust legacy. (*Children* 65)

Spiegelman's characterization of himself in *Prisoner on Hell Planet* certainly exhibits feelings of guilt in these panels since he blames himself for his mother's, Anja's, suicide. He writes, "I felt nauseous…The guilt was overwhelming" (*Maus I* 102). The fact that Spiegelman depicts himself as guilty is almost incredible since clearly he has his own personal psychological problems to deal with: "I was living with my parents, as I agreed to do on my release from the state mental hospital three months before" (*Maus I* 100). Yet, despite (or because of) his problems, he feels responsible for his mother's suicide. The original act of writing *Prisoner from Hell Planet* reflects another attempt of Spiegelman's to address trauma in a specific context: a limited "I" of the self.

Prisoner on the Hell Planet also illustrates Art's relationship to the Holocaust; throughout this passage, Spiegelman depicts himself in the prisoner garb of the Holocaust—the striped pajama-like outfit with a cap. However, this

attempt to make a connection between the events of his mother's suicide and his position in relation to the Holocaust is underscored by his alienation from his cultural heritage: "At her funeral Art reveals his own distance from Jewish ritual. He recites verses from the Tibetan *Book of the Dead* while Vladek recites the traditional *kaddish* (prayer for the dead)" (*Children* 65). Art, the child of survivors, is alienated from the significant portions of his cultural heritage; the overwhelming connection that Spiegelman visually makes in terms of his identity discourse as Jewish is mainly in terms of Holocaust discourse. Throughout this autobiographical insertion, the reader gains a fuller understanding of Art's relationship to the Holocaust because he, as the author/artist, connects Anja's suicide to Hitler and to the guilt he feels as a child of survivors.

The final passage of *Prisoner from the Hell Planet* also emphasizes Art's role as a child. Although the reader sees this characterization of Spiegelman as a young man of twenty, the ending of this insertion repeats the duality of the adult/child dynamic that Spiegelman develops throughout both texts. His final statement is, "You **murdered** me, Mommy, and you left me here to take the rap" (*Maus I* 103). This statement, coupled with the Spiegelman's visual depiction of himself in prison, illustrates the way in which Art's purpose in coming to terms with the Holocaust—the resolution of the child/adult dialectic—is linked with the memory of his mother. That she committed suicide without leaving a note (combined with the fact that Spiegelman never fully recounts his personal memories of her) signifies the ways in which this aspect of Spiegelman's relationship to his family and to his parents' discourses remains unresolved. The

child searches for his mommy but Anja, as an individual, is never depicted except through Vladek's memories; she remains unreachable to the child aspect of the narratorial "I" as it reflects the "I" of self through the interpretive function of the authorial/artistic "I."

This search for Anja is a subtext of *Maus I*, not only in terms of Spiegelman's depiction of his mother's suicide, but also in terms of Artie's search for her through her diaries. Throughout *Maus I*, Artie asks Vladek for his mother's diaries. As Artie notes, the diaries would be key in telling her side of the Holocaust after she and Vladek are separated: "This is where Mom's diaries will be **especially** useful. They'll give me some idea of what she went through while you were apart" (*Maus I* 158). For Spiegelman, the diaries serve as a key point of reviving the essence of his mother. The diaries would also serve to give Anja a voice that is denied her throughout both texts: "Anja's radical muteness underlies Vladek's loquacious verbosity, reminding the reader that for every survivor story that is spoken and heard, another remains unvoiced, forever lost" (Horowitz 280). However, Spiegelman/Artie/Art's desire to know his mother is thwarted by his father. Anja's story is irretrievably lost when Vladek burns her diaries.

The revelation of this destruction at the end of *Maus I* reveals to Artie-the-narrator the fact that his search for his mother through her diaries is impossible. At this moment, the "I" of the narrator labels Vladek a "murderer" (*Maus I* 159). In his reading of this passage, Joshua L. Charleson sees this naming as unfortunate: "the incongruity of using the word 'murderer' to describe his father's

burning of his mother's words and paper, framed against the harrowing panorama of mass murder delineated in his father's history, is too great to be dismissed as unfortunate overreaction" (103). In some ways, this seems to be the reaction that Spiegelman is striving for given the comments he makes about the ending of *Maus I*: "Well, I think people were very troubled by the ending of *Maus*, and this was good. 'Why is he calling his father a murderer—his father who went through all that horrible stuff.' It catches people up short because there is a tendency to see through the eyes of the narrator in any book you read. I wanted to provide some kind of blockage to that kind of transference" (*History* 153). Against the backdrop of the Holocaust, the destruction of Anja's diaries may seem insignificant, especially since Vladek is also a victim and to accuse him of murder tarnishes his role as Holocaust victim. Yet, Spiegelman's comment is partially misleading; given that the author has written/illustrated a whole book dedicated to both his and his father's memories of and relationships to the Holocaust, is it credible that the destruction of memory—of the only part of Anja that survives her suicide—would be of little importance to Spiegelman? The importance of the act of writing oneself into existence cannot be lost on Spiegelman. In addition, any hope that Art has of coming to a closure of his own guilt about his mother's suicide is lost in that burning. Thus, perhaps it is to the murder of Art's own self, the "I" that is attempting to come to terms with his trauma that Spiegelman refers.

There is another reason why Spiegelman might wish to catch his readers "up short" in our reading of Vladek since it forces into question our willingness to assign guilt to a Holocaust survivor. In this way, Spiegelman is calling attention

to an aspect of Arendt's concept of the Banality of Evil. Spiegelman's texts generally deal with the Banality of Evil in common ways—the fact that the Holocaust was so widespread depended on the larger community's unwillingness to challenge Nazi policy. Yet, throughout both texts, Vladek's biography focuses on the choices he made in ensuring his and Anja's survival, including his ingenuity in getting privileged positions at Auschwitz that gave him access to better food. For example, Vladek talks of teaching a kapo English in exchange for food (*Maus II* 32). While Vladek mentions helping his fellow prisoners, it is generally based on when he is able to do extra; in the panels I mentioned here, he eats the meal rather than trying to save food for his fellow prisoners, although he brings shoes to Mandelbaum after he gets good clothing (*Maus II* 33-34). These are depictions of choiceless choices. Since survival was arbitrary, most did what they could to survive. If one decided to smuggle food to one's fellow prisoners, there was no guarantee that the food would even make it there, thus lessening the odds of survival for the smuggler. On the biographical level of the text, this aligns with the standard refutation of the accusation imbedded in Arendt's concept of the Banality of Evil—that the Jews themselves participated in their own destruction. When Spiegelman calls his father a "murderer," the term echoes Arendt's accusation as it exists in Holocaust discourse. By catching the reader up short, Spiegelman is forcing us to face the affect of the critique embedded in the notion of "sheep to the slaughter." In this way, the text places itself within the larger discourse of the Holocaust. It may not be a complete rejection of Arendt's

concept but it does force intergenerational addressees to face the implications of Banality of Evil as it is applied to Holocaust victims.

The sections in *Maus I* that deal with Spiegelman's autobiographical attempts to understand and come to terms with the trauma of his childhood are not limited to the obvious markers that shift the focus from Vladek's testimony to Spiegelman's autobiography; indeed, as critic Jeanne C. Ewert notes, Spiegelman's mediation as an author inserts his childhood into Vladek's story through the figure of Richieu, Art's brother who died during the Holocaust. Specifically, Ewert focuses on the scene after Vladek has returned from fighting with the Polish army and is learning about the rationing of food (*Maus I* 75). During this narrative, Vladek recounts what is said by Anja and her family; as the author, Spiegelman inserts a visual subtext of Richieu misbehaving: "As the textual dialogue never mentions the child or his table manners, however, this little tableau is likely to go unremarked. Yet it is crucial to an understanding of one of the book's principle themes: Spiegelman's anger over his parents' idolizing of the dead Richieu, and his own sense that his care was neglected by his traumatized parents" (Ewert 88). This small passage serves to compress the image of the child Richieu with the neglected child Spiegelman remembers himself to be; he transfers his emotions onto Richieu and thereby inserts himself into the biography of Vladek.[6] In this way, the adult artist—the author—is manipulating the text to illustrate Art's—the self outside the text—viewpoint in terms of his frustrations about his parents.

Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began seems to mark a transition from the concerns of the child Spiegelman to the concerns of the adult Spiegelman, specifically in relation to his role as the author/artist of the text. This is not to say that the child does not continue to exist—indeed, the dedication to Richieu indicates that the concerns of the child connects Art to his dead brother (who he never knew since that child died in the Holocaust)—but that a major emphasis is placed on Spiegelman's self-reflexive questioning of his role as interpreter/creator/addressor. The subtitle of *Maus II*, "And Here My Troubles Began," indicates a continuation of the double discourses of Vladek's biography and Spiegelman's autobiography since it refers to both Spiegelman's self-reflexive questioning of his "I" as the artist (the troubles of depicting the Holocaust) and to Vladek's articulation of the most threatening times of his struggle for survival. This text focuses on Vladek's survival in Auschwitz, the biggest of the six death camps located in Poland. The threats that Vladek faces before arriving at Auschwitz are more immediate in this environment of mass murder even though he is able to work out a position of relative safety. The title of the third chapter, "And Here My Trouble Began" seems to indicate a specific context for "Trouble" since Vladek is forced to leave his relatively privileged role in Auschwitz during the mass evacuation of the camp. In this journey, Vladek's ability to protect himself really comes into question. Yet, the "My" of the subtitle indicates Spiegelman's voice as well as his father's; as the author and narrator of the story, the "My" can be read as an indication of Spiegelman's troubles. The first chapter gives the reader an idea of the kinds of "Troubles" that Spiegelman is

facing as he questions how he should visually represent his wife, Françoise. As Gillian Banner notes, "Françoise insists that it should be a mouse, Art is concerned because this does not adequately represent her Frenchness" (153). The dilemma is really brought forward by the fact of Françoise's conversion to Judaism. But, given the consideration that she is both French and Jewish, Spiegelman, the artist "I," cannot easily decide on how she should be depicted because the choice affects the interpretation. Thus, at the very beginning of the second text, Spiegelman is consciously calling the reader's attention to the issue of representation.

This self-reflexive questioning of representation is also repeated in the chapter "Auschwitz." The previous chapter, entitled "Mauschwitz" indicates the ways in which Spiegelman is continuing the theme of Mice. "Auschwitz" begins with Spiegelman questioning is role as artist in relationship to the Holocaust. The strongest image of this crisis of representation is the panel of Spiegelman at his desk which sits upon a pile of dead mice bodies, which was discussed earlier in terms of Spiegelman's own questioning about his artistic choices. This questioning is further marked by the theme of masking. Throughout this segment, Spiegelman depicts human characters wearing masks drawn from the thematic representations that he has developed throughout both texts: Spiegelman, the artist, wears a mask of Jewish identity—the face of the mouse—while the reporters/marketers wear masks identifying them as Americans (dog), Germans (cat), etc. The only other section where there is a similar image of masking is in Vladek's story when he talks of "passing" as Polish; since anti-Semitism often

focused on physical characteristics, it was possible for many whose families had assimilated into the mainstream culture to attempt to hide their Jewish identity (especially if they had light hair/eyes). Vladek does this in very limited ways (only when he is trying to avoid the round-ups of Jews in Poland). Spiegelman depicts these scenes with Vladek wearing the mask of a pig (his symbol for the Polish) (ex. *Maus I* 125). One can make the connection between these two images of masking since there is a lot of evidence that Spiegelman, as the artist, is aware of the visual similarities between the two images. The image of the mouse wearing the pig mask (with the strings visible) is similar to Spiegelman, the human artist, wearing a mouse mask that is obviously tied on. Since the mask is a sign of assumed identity (or a limited identity discourse for the human who is wearing a mask), the "I" of the author is encoding an illustration that specifically limits any reading of the multiple selves to a focus on Jewish identity.

Yet, the question then arises: Why is Artie wearing a mask? The wearing of a mask, which Spiegelman has constructed as a visual signifier of Jewish identity in his rendering of the Holocaust, serves to focus the autobiographical aspect of the work in terms of Art's relationship to the Holocaust and its effects on his family. The reader is denied a full view of this rendering of the self as "I" since the overall text only addresses the self outside the text (Art) through the limited lens of Jewish identity in terms of the Holocaust. Even when Spiegelman the artist visually transforms the narrator into a child, it is in connection to the artist being overwhelmed by the responsibility of his representations of the Holocaust and resisting the marketing of his creation—in this moment, the

narrator cries for his mother. The idea that this is a child trying to come to terms with his identity as a second-generation witness is compounded with the idea that this text is meant to help the "I" of the self (Art) to work out the trauma caused by his thick relationship to Holocaust discourse. Spiegelman notes that during the scene with Pavel, his psychiatrist, he also gives Pavel a mask of identity: "I don't know if it's clear from my drawings. But in the frames where I am talking to my shrink, I have him wear the mask of my father. It's not just that he's the father I might have chosen. It's a little observation about the psychoanalytic process. It's all about transference, which is being able to work out the problems one has with one's parents in a safer setting" (*History* 153). Here, Spiegelman makes the connection between this work (the "I" as author/artist) and his own process of recovery (the "I" of self); the act of transference in his real life is retold in the text through the "I" of the narrator. Indeed, Spiegelman seems to refer to the process of the MAUS project as an attempt to gain understanding when he says, "I mean, I can't even make any sense out of my relationship with my father…how am I supposed to make any sense out of Auschwitz?…of the Holocaust?…" (*Maus II* 14). This indicates that Spiegelman sees this text as more than a simple recording of his father's story. It is a liminal space where his discourse is at play with the discourse of the Holocaust. The texts are also a "safer setting" for Art to work out his own process of healing.

There are many indications that Art is coming to terms with some of the ghosts that have haunted him throughout his life. One major figure that Art has to confront in this text, *Maus II*, is that of Richieu, his brother who died during the

Holocaust. Richieu's actual story, however, is told in *Maus I*. It is in the second text that Spiegelman attempts to come to terms with the image of his dead brother. The dedication of this text to Richieu is combined with a picture of this lost son of Vladek and Anja. It is interesting that Spiegelman would include the picture since it is one that has haunted him throughout his childhood. He writes:

> "That's the point. They didn't **need** photos of me in their room…I was **alive!**…The photo never threw tantrums or got into any kind of trouble…It was an ideal kid, and I was a pain in the ass. I couldn't compete. They didn't **talk** about Richieu, but that photo was a kind of reproach. **He**'d have become a **doctor**, and married a wealthy Jewish girl…the creep. But at least we could've made **Him** go deal with Vladek…It's **spooky** having sibling rivalry with a snapshot!" (*Maus II* 15; bolds in text)

This is the first point where the reader really begins to see how Art viewed Richieu. Clearly, the image of his brother throughout his life is not a happy one since, at least in Art's mind, the parents' idolized the son who passed away. Yet, as it has already been noted, Spiegelman uses the image of his brother as a connection between the child theme of the texts and his relationship to the Holocaust by interweaving the autobiography into the biography. Here, Spiegelman compounds the image by putting the two in tension; it is not until Art, the "I" of the self, achieves some resolution to his process of recovery and comes to terms with his relationship to his family and the nightmare of the Holocaust that the image of Richieu no longer haunts him.

At the very end of *Maus II*, Spiegelman seems to finally come to a resolution of his public exploration of the private trauma of the experiences of the Holocaust has on his family through the symbolic death of the child theme of the narrative. In the last frame of Vladek talking with Artie, he calls him Richieu: "I'm tired from talking, Richieu, and it's enough stories for now…" (*Maus II* 136). Whether this is really the last thing that Vladek says to his living son or not is unclear; even if this is where the story ended, one still has to acknowledge that the choice to include this is Spiegelman's as the artist. Here, Spiegelman is consciously making a connection between himself, the child theme, and the brother who was lost in the Holocaust. This compression of all of these themes into the last section of the text indicates the way in which Spiegelman is closing the story not just in terms of his father's death but in terms of Art's own change: the growing up of the child who is haunted by the Holocaust and its effect on his family.

The final image of the *Maus* texts is of a Spiegelman gravestone marked with the dates of both of his parents (but not of Richieu). Underneath the stone, Spiegelman writes, "Art Spiegelman 1978-1991" (*Maus II* 136). In essence, Spiegelman is closing his relationship, his process of coming to terms with the Holocaust with a symbolic death. But whose death is it really? Is it a death at all? In a very specific way, it indicates the death of the "I" as narrator since that "I" cannot exist outside of the text. But what does it mean for the "I" of the artist/author who will continue to create or, even more importantly, the intergenerational "I" of the self that is coming to terms with his own trauma? The

dates indicate the thirteen years that Spiegelman worked on the project. Yet, it is also the age of a young child—possibly the child image of himself that he has developed throughout both texts. But the resolution of the tensions between the adult and child does not necessarily lie with the death of one or the other since death also symbolizes change. The age of thirteen is also symbolic in Jewish culture since it is the age when a boy will have his Bar Mitzvah—the ritual that symbolizes the transition from the child to the adult.[7] The symbolic death of the "I" of the narrator becomes the sign of the future for the "I" of the self and, in that future, the "I" of the artist/author. In essence, the process of writing the *Maus* project is the process through which Spiegelman is coming to terms with what he views as his child's relationship to the discourses of his parents and of the Holocaust. The artist consciously creates a child image to symbolize the way in which the adult feels small when compared to this history both within his family and within his culture. The symbolic death/change of the "I" of the narrator at the end of the project indicates the fact that Art (the self), through his autobiography, is coming of age through the artist/author's act of writing/drawing *Maus*. The implications of this coming to terms can be seen in Spiegelman's latest work, *In the Shadow of No Towers*, where he will again periodically take on the mouse persona. The difference in representation between the texts seems to lie in the fact that the mouse persona is no longer a contested site/sight. It is important to view *Maus I & II* as much Spiegelman's personal connection to the Holocaust as it is Vladek's testimony of the Holocaust. Through that duality of narrative structure, Spiegelman can address his personal trauma as it relates to an event that

continues to haunt future generations. The memory of the Holocaust cannot and does not haunt just the survivors; it haunts the children of survivors and, through them, other intergenerational witnesses.

Notes:

[1]The breaking up of the autobiographical self into the three "I"s of self, author, and narrator is based on Phillipe Lejeune's theory of autobiography as presented in *On Autobiography*. Although the split is usually presented as author/narrator/protagonist in reference to a self outside the text, here I have compressed the narrator to include the role of the protagonist in order to highlight the differences between the self as author/artist and the self completely outside the text (to whom the name refers). This is especially important since the author/artist only focuses on a limited representation of the self outside the text.

[2]Instances of this acceptance of *Maus I & II* can be found in Nancy K Miller's "Cartoons of the Self: Portrait of the Artist as a Young Murderer—Art Spiegleman's *Maus*" where she explores the idea of autobiography based on alterity and in Michael G Levine's "Necessary Stains: Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and the Bleeding of History" where he draws on the connections between the texts and Spiegelman's status as a second generation witness.

[3]This view is supported by Caroline Wiedmer who points out: "the crises of self-representation is resolved precisely through the transformation of a private, subconscious narrative into a pragmatic public one, where the stress is shifted from the problems of suppression of images to the problems of expressing these same images"(30).

[4]As Dominick LaCapra recognizes: "Working through trauma involves the effort to articulate or rearticulate affect and representation in a manner that may never transcend, but may to some viable extent counteract, a reenactment, or acting out of that disabling association" (Writing 42).

[5]Genre as a way of understanding the "I" of the author can also be seen in the way that the form necessitates a familiar visual language in order to be effective. In his presentation "Comix: 101" on February 2nd 2006, Spiegelman noted that many visuals use stereotypes in order to work because one cannot create a visual entirely devoid of social meaning and have the reader relate to it.

[6]It is also a moment where the character of his brother comes to life (revivification) in a way that is not possible through Vladek's biography alone.

[7]Hamida Bosmajian in "The Orphaned Voice in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*" also explores the connection between the age 13 and its role in Jewish culture.

CHAPTER 4

IMAGINING INTO THE VOID: REVIVIFICATION IN SKIBELL'S *BLESSING ON THE MOON*

> The ethics of the twentieth century opens with Nietzsche's overcoming of resentment. Against the impotence of the will with respect to the past, against the spirit of revenge for what has irrevocably taken place and can no longer be willed, Zarathustra teaches men to will backward, to desire everything to repeat itself. The critique of Judeo-Christian morality is completed in our century in the name of a capacity fully to assume the past, liberating oneself once and for all of guilt and bad conscience. The eternal return is above all victory over resentment, the possibility of willing what has taken place, transforming every "it was" into "thus I wanted it to be"—amor fati.
>
> Auschwitz also marks a decisive rupture in this respect. Let us imagine repeating the experiment of Nietzsche, under the heading "The Heaviest Weight," proposes in *The Gay Science*. "One day or night," a demon glides beside a survivor and asks: "Do you want Auschwitz to return again and again, innumerable times, do you want every instant, every single detail of the camp to repeat itself for eternity, returning eternally in the same precise sequence in which they took place? Do you want this to happen again, again and again for eternity?" This simple reformulation of the experiment suffices to refute it beyond all doubt, excluding the possibility of its even being proposed.
>
> --Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*

In *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays*, Lawrence Langer writes, "The drama of fate reminds us that man, should he so choose, can die for something; the drama of doom, the history of the Holocaust, reveals that whether they choose or not, men died for nothing" (157). If Joseph Skibell were to respond to Langer's remark, he might say, "Probably…but what happens afterwards?" In *Blessing on the Moon*, Skibell's intergenerational response to the Holocaust, the story opens with an Einsatzgruppen killing Chaim Skibelski, Skibell's protagonist and namesake, along with the other Jews of the village. The

story truly begins when Chaim emerges from the mass grave, dead. Unlike Art Spiegelman who interweaves his autobiography as a second-generation witness around and through his father's first-generation story of survival, Skibell's self-reflexive positioning as an intergenerational witness, specifically that of a third-generation witness whose great grandfather and at least seventeen other family members were killed in the Holocaust, is marked by silent rather than spoken testimony. It is precisely into this absence that Skibell writes. Skibell's use of magical realism as a tool to revivify his great grandfather functions as a liminal space since it is in the impossibility—the unknown and unknowable—that Chaim exists. Through Chaim, without whom Skibell himself would not exist, Skibell invokes discourses in conflict (death and life); in that sense, the text functions as Skibell's attempt to resolve the ongoing impact of the Holocaust by questioning the nature of forgiveness, the banality of evil, and redemption through a return to cultural heritage.

Unlike second-generation witnesses who directly experience narratives of the Holocaust from their parents, Skibell's position as an intergenerational witness is marked by a different kind of closeness—the very real and felt absence of a large portion of his family. The presence of this absence has a profound affect of second- and third-generation witnesses that creates a different kind of closeness to the event. In "Making Sense of the World," Andrew Beierle quotes Skibell as saying "When I was growing up, my grandfather and two of his brothers were living in my town. They never talked at all about these people, and as a normally sensitive child, I picked up on it. That silence was very palpable for

me. As a child, I assumed that there was some sort of shame in it. Instead, I realized later that it was just horrible, horrible grief" (para 11). Skibell's closeness, even as it is also marked by the silence about the Holocaust that is common in many Jewish families and communities, is linked specifically at the site of absence and the grief that makes that site's presence felt. In her discussion of second-generation literature from those who both survived and those who perpetrated the Holocaust, Erin McGlothlin notes:

> Just as the pains cannot be traced to their cause, the trauma of the second generation is essentially divorced from the Holocaust experience that engendered it. The signifier remains, but it is unable to locate its referent, resulting in the truncated relationship between experience and effect. For the children of survivors, this experience is one of unintegrated trauma and rupture in familial continuity; for the children of the perpetrators it is the family's unintegratable history of violation and brutality. (10)[1]

Since the referent—the real person who was killed—is absent from the intergenerational relationship, a rupture occurs at the site of that absence. With the emotional weight passed to Skibell from his grandfather, that absence becomes the signifier loosed from its moors. The "unintegratable" aspect of the absence becomes the site of the liminal space between Skibell's discourse and that of his murdered family.

The question then becomes how does the intergenerational witness resolve the two discourses, especially if one is marked by its void? The answer is through imagination: "Their imagination of the Holocaust past of the parents becomes a

way for them to reconnect to the referent of the mark and thus to try to establish a link between experience and effect. In this way, the writers not only investigate the reference point of their invisible inscriptions, but they in turn actively inscribe as well, making the ways the Holocaust has impacted them" (McGlothlin 10). By writing into the absence, intergenerational witnesses are working through the contact between discourses. Thus the narrative becomes the resolution of the differend—a way of acknowledging the silence and its meaning through the new addressor. In a later passage of his interview with Beierle, Skibell notes, "I grew up with all these demonic Nazi images, but in the process of writing this book, I discovered that behind this bank of demons was this group of ghosts—literal ghosts, my grandfather's sisters and parents. The easy iconography of the Holocaust, which is everywhere today, has kind of blotted out the presence of these very human figures, these people. My relatives" (para. 13). In finding the presence of his ancestors, in revivifying them at the point of rupture, Skibell's new role as an addressor is fundamentally based on the very human nature of his ancestors. In that way, Skibell's discourse on the Holocaust gains in complexity since he moves beyond "the easy iconography of the Holocaust." Through revivification, a community of memory is created; as a new addressor, Skibell offers a bridge through his imagination.

Given the lack of direct contact between the discourse of the Holocaust and the discourse of an intergenerational witness such as Skibell, imagination functions where direct memory cannot. As Avishai Margalit notes, "But imagination means two things: the ability to conjure images, and thereby to

consider things that are not present but that exist or existed; and the ability to fantasize unreal things. Memory is constrained by the past. Imagination, in the fanciful sense of the word, is not" (140). It is the freedom of imagination that makes the intergenerational witness dangerous, especially if one is not tied to an ethical, close relationship to those that "existed." In using imagination to create a community of memory, one must be ethically tied to the first addressor. Yet, the fact remains that in writing into absence, the only narrative that is possible is one based on imagination. As Eugene Arva, in *Writing the Vanishing Real: Hyperreality and Magical Realism*, notes, "Signification [of reality] becomes particularly important when its object is the unrepresentable, a reality of extreme events which, by their traumatic nature, resist representation. Signification in such a case needs to be understood not as an imitation of reality (*mimesis*) but, rather, as its reconstruction, as its signification by imagination, or *re*-presentation" (67). Since the addressee is compelled to become an addressor, the author must use the discourses available to him or her. In re-presenting reality, the author is enabled to re-inscribe the absence so that it functions not as a discourse of void but as a means towards the resolution of discourses in contact.

One approach in which to understand the ways the discourses of life and death, including the fact that Skibell's life is in some ways limned by the death of his great grandfather and members of his extended family, are combined is through Lawrence Langer's idea of deathlife narrative. For Langer, deathlife is a way to characterize Holocaust survival and the sentiment of, as Langer quotes Primo Levi, "living but without being alive" (xii). Deathlife, for some Holocaust

survivors, refers to the feeling that they experienced death at the camps even though they survived; Langer continues the development of this idea by quoting Jorge Semprun's autobiography: "that I have not escaped death, but passed through it. Rather: that it has passed through me. That I have, in a way, lived through it" (xii). For those who lived in the camps, they were always surrounded by death—of others and by the constant threat to their own lives. The trauma of that experience is not one that passes since deathlife emerges post-Holocaust—they return to their lives but always changed, knowing that their lives were arbitrarily chosen for survival and come at the cost of the dead. In addition, every event of their lives is limned by the past and overtakes the present at any given moment as something happens that brings forth their experiences in the Holocaust.

On the surface, the idea of intergenerational deathlife narratives seems incongruous given the traumatic experiences encompassed within Langer's use of the term.[2] But, in looking at intergenerational responses as a way of creating a living community of memory—of revivifying those who died—in a way that connects them to our lived experiences, there are aspects of the term that are apt, especially for writers like Skibell and Foer whose narratives exist within the void created by the deaths of their families. The characters, with their self-reflexive ties to each respective author, that they create emerge in death—the real deaths of members of their families. In Skibell's narrative, his protagonist dies at the beginning of the text. The rest of the narrative follows his journey as one of the dead. Part of Foer's text (which will be discussed in greater detail in the next

chapter) creates the history of the shetl his grandfather escaped from just before the Nazi's destroyed it—a creation made possible only through its absence. The other part of Foer's text creates the deathlife of the perpetrator—the one who makes a choiceless choice that is buried in silence. For both authors, deathlife potentially invokes the continued presence of the Holocaust in our world through the liminal space of the imagination that creates life because of death: "Exposed to mass death, the writer runs up against the abyssal absence of foundation which conditions his language; this experience is the means through which the silence of the dead comes to speech in its impossibility, the silence which is told to us by 'every word.' The demand of thinking after Auschwitz would be above all to expose and bear witness to this silence at the heart of language" (Cohen 108). In Skibell's text, the historical death of his great grandfather is the imaginative moment of the life of his character: "It all happened so quickly. They rounded us up, took us out to the forests. We stood there, shivering, like trees in uneven rows, and one by one we fell. No one was brave enough to look. Guns kept cracking in the air. Something pushed into my head. It was hard, like a rock. I fell" (3). The first lines of Skibell's text depict his great grandfather's death; the rest of the text is the journey of Skibell's revivified grandfather.

In reviving his great grandfather as the character of Chaim Skibelski, Skibell refuses to allow the reader to forget that he is dead. Throughout the novel, the visible signs of his death are constantly invoked—the bullet holes, the endless bleeding, the brokenness of his body and yet "Chaim exhibits most of the characteristics of the living: he thinks, feels, worries, wonders, acts" (Rosenfield

15). Yet, Skibell cannot imaginatively escape the death of his great grandfather and, thus, his great grandfather is tied to this world through Skibell's imagination. As Janet Burstein notes, "A 'dead and mutilated Jew,' he haunts this world, wishing to leave but unable to let it go. He cannot be healed or restored to life, and before he is released into forgetfulness, he will need to wander the earth, listening to the sorrows of others both alive and dead, asking unanswerable questions about forgiveness and responsibility" (125). In some ways, Chaim needs to walk this earth because of what was done to him; indeed, it seems as if many of the victims are doomed to this fate in the text because of the violation of their deaths. Skibell talks about this in his interview with Beierle, "In the cartography of the Jewish afterlife, there is something called *gehenna,* which is where you purify your soul from whatever damage has been done to it over the course of your life," Skibell says. "In some ways I think that is where Chaim is" (Beierle para 18). While the damage can be self-inflicted, Skibell offers the idea that damage has been done not only to the soul of his great grandfather but also in the world.

In leaving the pit where he and the rest of the Jewish community are buried, Chaim chooses to return to his home. In part, this is because he does not yet realize he is dead and, joyful of his survival, he returns home almost instinctively only to find that the townspeople have already taken their belongings, homes, and their lives in the community. For instance, the family that moves into Chaim's household act as if the house is rightfully theirs: "They are people I know, people I have traded with. Eggs sometimes, bread, linens, goods

of this sort. 'Look how nice everything is,' the Mama says to her sons, clapping her hands in delight. 'So beautiful, Mamuśku, so beautiful,' a daughter says, but she is the one they never pay attention to, and the eldest son says over her, 'A toast! To our home and our table!' The father's face beams with pride" (Skibell 6). On a basic level, this scene illustrates the banality of evil—the way in which individuals worked with the Nazis for personal gain. Here, they are focused solely on their comfort and find easy ways to justify their actions. In talking with his daughter, the only one who can see Chaim and realizes what has happened to their neighbors, the father says, "Blubbering over some silly people who'd do the same to us—yes, Ola, to us—to your mother and to your father and to you—given half the chance!" (Skibell 32). Whatever moral implications exist for the choices the family has made, the father refuses to acknowledge them—or, he defies them openly when he finally becomes aware of Chaim's presence in the house. In Schorsch's discussion of the idea of hauntings in literature and within Polish culture, he notes that "not all who saw Jewish ghosts gained positive self-transformation from the experience. Many resented (and resent) the haunting specter precisely for its accusations" (152). As Schorsch notes, the father only thinks of the ghost in relationship to money—a tie, perhaps, to his own guilty conscience but ultimately shallow.

This scene where Chaim first witnesses the usurpation of his former life works to illustrate the complicity backed by greed that motivated some to work with the Nazis in rounding up Jews; certainly, we cannot say that the Serafinskis are faced with a choiceless choice although by saying that the Jews would

persecute the non-Jews if given a chance seeks to render his decision as one of self-preservation. The scene also illustrates an historical truth following the war when survivors went back to their homes to find their neighbors living in them—and unwilling to return to the survivors their property.[3] In mirroring Chaim's return to his village to the tales told by other survivors, Skibell is also grounding his text with other survivor stories. In this way, Skibell's magical realism is grounded on historical fact—one that is easily recognized by those who are familiar with the Holocaust. It also illustrates an aspect of the deathlife narrative; in returning back to their homes, many survivors faced a kind of legal death in their communities (and in the larger society) and were unable to reclaim their former lives (although the possibility of "returning to normal" was unlikely given the trauma of their experiences).

In spite of the fact that his family home is inhabited by others, Chaim seeks to find some measure of familiarity by staying in the house. He does so by assuming the familial roles from his pre-death life with the only still living person able (or willing) to see him, Ola. Indeed, Ola, a "thirteen or fourteen year old," becomes a surrogate daughter and, more disturbingly, lover/wife for Chaim (Skibell 23). Close to death herself from illness, Ola rejects her family and chooses to try to care for herself. The fact that she is unable to do so is evident by the appalling conditions of her room. Her family, alienated from her by her critique of the acquiescence to the deaths of their neighbors, offer only minimal care for their dying child. Once Ola sees Chaim (and not just the blood from his wounds that stains the house), he takes care of her:

> Quietly, I open the door to her room. She is curled up in the rocking chair, still, her eyes red, her cheeks drawn, sucking on a thumb encrusted with her own filth.
>
> "You mustn't," I say, removing her hand from her mouth. I rub it with the hot cloth, wiping the dirt away. (Skibell 35)

In this moment, Ola is completely a child, sucking her thumb. And, while Chaim completely cleans her body, this part of the scene is nonsexual—he even dresses her in his daughter's clothes. However, the lines drawn between looking at her as a surrogate daughter and a lover become blurred by the end of the chapter when Ola goes from her bed to where Chaim is sleeping in his daughter Sabina's bed. Although this is not the moment when Chaim and Ola do have sex, it does indicate the dual nature in which Chaim sees Ola.

The scene where Chaim and Ola do have sex poses a dilemma for the readers. As Marita Grimwood notes, "The fact that his [Chaim's] relationship with Ola becomes sexual is something that troubles him, as he reflects, 'never while I lived did I place myself in such compromising circumstance!'" (96). By framing his concern for himself—that the act is compromising, not morally wrong—Chaim's reaction is concerning, especially since the reader might believe that Ola is still a child. However, Skibell immediately calls that interpretation into question when Chaim, immediately after their encounter, he goes to the garage to search for the portraits of his daughters (again, building a connection between Ola and his view of her as a kind of daughter). While there, he breaks a piece of glass, awakening Łukasz, his porter, and Łukasz's niece. In this scene,

Skibell calls attention to the slippage of time: "The sight of her confuses me. She was no more than a small child the last time I saw her, playing in the timber yard, a day or two before my execution. Now, I'm astonished to see a young woman with a heavy bosom elevated by two crossed arms, which she uses to pin the blanket in its place" (54). Because he is dead, Chaim loses his sense of time. This scene also indicates that Ola is probably not as young as when she is first introduced in the text. But, Skibell refuses to allow this scene to absolve Chaim of the wrongness of his action by paralleling Chaim with Łukasz, who takes this moment to make a sexual advance on his niece. The violation of the Uncle's actions towards his niece (who he took in as a young child) mirror Chaim's violation of his and Ola's relationship since he acts as her father and caregiver through the bulk of their relationship in the text.

So, what is gained by first having the reader believe that Chaim has committed an act of pedophilia only to suggest that Ola may, at that time, been a young woman, and then continue to reprimand the act by paralleling it with a similar violation of familial-type roles? Grimwood suggests that the relationship between Ola and Chaim must be contextualized with the rest of the text: "This relationship's transgressiveness, however, is a feature that it shares with other aspects of Chaim's afterlife, such as the rabbi's transformation into a distinctly non-kosher crow, which then steals a wedding ring, and pecks out a man's eyes" (96). There is a difference, however, in the motives behind each act. The Rebbe attacks a man (probably a Nazi administrator and not a soldier given the fact he is wearing a homburg) as he "congratulates our town on its spirit of heroic

cooperation" (Skibell 9). The attack can be read as revenge. In addition, the Rebbe uses the theft of the wedding ring to show Chaim his reflection in the water. The motives for Chaim's actions are much more banal. Like other intergenerational writers, Skibell makes his character deeply flawed in an effort to both humanize (not idealize) the character and to subtly hint that the evils one commits, both large and small, have motives that arise out of very common and often selfish desires.

Skibell provides a more prominent commentary on the banality of evil when Chaim returns to the pit where his neighbors are buried after Ola's death. The return to the pit marks the end of Chaim's pretending at a return to his life before his death. As Pamela Stadden in her article, "Narrative Techniques and Holocaust Literature," notes, "Up until Ola's death, Skibelski is basically stationary, living within his old home, caring for the ailing girl. The first time he visits the grave, he converses with the other dead Jews. The second time he returns, he sets them free" (156). Like Chaim, his neighbors occupy the same liminal space—both dead but not yet in the world to come. From the beginning of the text, Chaim wonders why he is not in the world to come. The fact that all the townspeople (and, as we will see later, all the Jews) inhabit the same space—gehenna—indicates a larger sense damage and a vaster idea of the soul that is damaged by the Holocaust. As Alan Berger, in "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and Identity in Third Generation Writing about the Holocaust," remarks "Traditional piety and belief in the world to come (olam ha'ba) have been shattered by the catastrophe" (154). The fact that this shattering is not singular

indicates that Skibell's self-reflexive text evokes not just his family history but a larger sense of the community.

Although it is technically the Rebbe who frees the rest of the town's murdered Jews, the fact that Chaim found his way out of the pit and left the rest of his neighbors is not forgotten. While the first greetings are filled with rejoicing from the freedom of being buried in the grave, the joy is edged with horror since it is clear that whatever damage Chaim's death did to his body, his neighbors are in worse shape from their years underground, decomposing. All of the people, including Chaim, bear the visible and visceral signs of their deaths—all are suffering. Yet, there is a felt difference between the townspeople and Chaim. As the group, led by the Rebbe, begin their march (a supernatural reflection of the death marches at the end of the war), one of Chaim's friends confronts him:

> "Then why did you leave me in the pit?"
>
> I am startled by his question. "Pardon me?" I say.
>
> "I must know"
>
> "Is this an accusation?"
>
> "You just ran, didn't you?"
>
> "I ran. Of course, I ran! What else was I to do?"
>
> "Without thinking to stop or help anybody else!"
>
> "Keep your voice down," I implore him, stealing a look into the sleeping field.
>
> "But how could you just leave us there?"
>
> "You were dead," I whisper. (Skibell 92)

In this moment, we see the aspect of Hannah Arendt's idea of the banality of evil—the accusation that, even though Chaim himself is dead as well, he reacts to save himself and leaves his neighbors to suffer. Thematically, this accusation allows us to see how the banality of evil operates, especially given the fact that, despite his flaws, the reader tends to view Chaim sympathetically: "the author presents a very likeable profile of his great grandfather. Chaim Skibelski is a genuinely good man. So much so, we feel the injustice of his murder and his years of pain in the afterlife" (Stadden 155). The fact that the reader relates to this character is integral for the discussion of the banality of evil to work in the text in that it cannot simply be abjected onto the figure of the Nazi (in whatever form it appears).

The fact that the idea of the banality of evil is attached to Chaim both in his relationship with Ola and in his abandonment of his neighbors and friends does not mean that this discussion is solely centered on Chaim. When Chaim becomes separated from the group, a German soldier captures him: "A young soldier points his rifle at my face. 'One step more,' he says, 'and I'll kill you again'" (Skibell 98). The soldier quickly takes the power in the situation, acting as he did during the war. This time, however, Chaim chooses to fight back—angry at the soldier and at God for allowing this to happen when he's already dead. The moment becomes horribly comic when Chaim takes the gun and hits the soldier in the chest; unfortunately, for the soldier, he, too, is dead having been decapitated by a partisan with an axe. Unable to reattach the head to the body,

which has since run off, Chaim ends up carrying the head with him. At first the talking head attacks Chaim, specifically his Jewishness, for his role in the war:

> He smiles grimly. "I'm not prepared to argue the theoretics of warfare here and now with a dead Jew." He spits this last word off his tongue as though it were an annoying scrap of tobacco. "if it weren't for you," he says, "I'd still be at the conservatory, working on my compositions." He stretches his lower lip into a frown.
>
> "If it weren't for me?"
>
> "For your people." (Skibell 103)

Unable at this moment to recognize his culpability, the head follows the propagandist scapegoating that was used to justify his actions. Thus, he denies the evil of his actions by placing them onto the Other.

As readers looking at this from what we know now about the history, there is little sympathy for the head's statement at this moment. Skibell, however, wants to avoid easy judgments; if we see the head as solely evil, we miss the message inherent in the theme of the banality of evil that runs through the text. One night, the head begins to be self-reflective, finally acknowledging the horror of his actions: "I have done things, Herr Jude, during the last days of my life, that I never dreamed possible, things which, as a child or even as a young man, I would not have believed myself capable. I don't need to detail them to you. You are only too familiar with the kind of thing I mean" (Skibell 116). As the head, without its body, seems to be dying (again), he voices his awareness of what he did and recognizes Chaim's victimization.[4] Indeed, the head states he has a

purpose in picking out Chaim from the other members of the group: “Perhaps because you were less rotted than the others, I was able to persuade myself that I recognized you from that morning. I needn’t explain, I’m sure which morning I mean. Perhaps it is foolish of me, Herr Jude, to believe that I killed you. But I do. There. It’s been said. And is it so unreasonable an assumption?” (Skibell 117). Chaim has reason to be skeptical of this statement, given the threat that the head first gave when he was in a position of power and the fact that this confession comes when the head is dying. The fact that the head refers to him as “Herr Jude” also indicates a slippage in the referent; Chaim could be the one he shot or a representative figure for those that the German soldier killed.

This scene where the head of the German soldier asks for Chaim’s forgiveness specifically recalls Simon Wiesenthal’s testimony of his time in a concentration camp in Lemberg, Poland. Beryl Lang, in his book, *The Future of the Holocaust: Between History and Memory*, summarizes the narrative:

> Karl, an SS man, knew that he was dying. He had asked the nurse to bring to him in secret one of the Jewish laborers—for (as he recounted it to Wiesenthal) he had on his conscience an atrocity committed by his unit on the Russian front. After capturing a small town there, members of the unit (Karl among them) had herded a number of Jews into a house which was then locked. Some of the Jews driven into the house had been forced to carry cans a gasoline with them; the soldiers then threw grenades into the house—and the carnage that resulted was what one could have

> predicted (and what, indeed, had been intended). Karl, tormented by this act, had asked the nun to bring one of the Jewish laborers so that he could now, before he died, ask forgiveness. (131)

The similarity in the story lines is unmistakable, even with the significant difference that while the head believes he is talking to his victim (or, more likely, one of his victims), Karl seeks out a representative figure for his apology.[5] This is no small point of discrepancy. Wiesenthal denies Karl that forgiveness by leaving the room in silence:

> How, Wiesenthal asked himself, could *he* forgive someone for harm that a person had done to someone *else*—which was exactly what the SS man was requesting (since he had not been directly responsible for anything that Wiesenthal himself had suffered)? Is it only the injured person who may decide whether to grant or withhold forgiveness? What would have been the moral value of Wiesenthal's words even if he did tell Karl that he forgave him for the terrible act he had taken part in against other people, people who, because of that act, could not now or ever speak for themselves? (Lang 132)

The question of whether forgiveness is even possible is complicated in Wiesenthal's case since he is not the direct victim of Karl's actions. In Skibell's text, the dilemma of being asked for forgiveness is potentially avoided, although the fact that Chaim is addressed in a general, rather than specific name, indicates the potential that this scene can be understood as a more direct parallel to

Wiesenthal's experience. Yet, however one chooses to interpret the scene, Skibell's focus on the issue of forgiveness poses a dilemma in the text—both for Chaim and, potentially, for his readers.

The obligations surrounding forgiveness are complicated as one begins to examine Jewish notions of forgiving. In the *Ethics of Memory*, Avishai Margalit discusses the genealogy of forgiving and forgetting:

> The Bible uses the Hebrew word *salakh*, meaning forgive, only for God's forgiveness. It does not use it for one person's forgiving another, as is the case in modern Hebrew. The prevalent word used in the Bible for the latter purpose is *nasa*, meaning 'to bear' or 'to carry.' This term is interesting because it presents an alternative picture of the sin as a heavy burden. The forgiver shares the sinner's burden of sin. (186)

In Skibell's text, we see a direct image of this relationship through the fact that Chaim comes to carry the head once it has been separated from its body. It is an unwieldy, demanding, pathetic burden—one that Chaim cares for even as he wants to punish it. When the head does ask for forgiveness, Chaim responds, "'Little head,' I say, 'when you killed me, you took everything. My home, my wife, my children. Must you have my forgiveness as well?'" (Skibell 117). It is neither forgiveness nor the direct refusal of it, as when Wiesenthal leaves Karl without saying anything. Rather, the statement potentially indicates the obligation of the request—a "Must." In his further discussion of forgiveness, Margalit discusses Maimonides statement about forgiveness, "This is a forceful exhortation

to forgive, which places an obligation on the person who was wronged to forgive the offender when the latter is sincerely repentant. The passage gives the impression that forgiveness if not an act of loving kindness but a moral obligation" (194). Wiesenthal's situation poses a different kind of quandary because he is not the direct victim although it appears that Karl is sincere in asking for forgiveness. Chaim feels this as an obligation—one that is painful to grant. Skibell never allows the reader to see whether Chaim forgives the head but he continues to carry the head as a burden until he eventually (and anticlimactically) loses it. Thus, we return to the idea of the ethics of forgiveness: "I shall argue that the image of covering up is conceptually, psychologically, and morally preferable to the picture of blotting out—that it is better to cross out than to delete the memories of an offense. In short, I argue that forgiveness based on disregarding the sin rather than forgetting it" (Margalit 197). Once he is able to disregard the sin, he leaves the burden of the head behind—thus healing some of the damage that was done to his soul.

The episode encompassing the head and Chaim's personal conflict represents only one very small part of what the Holocaust represented—it does not speak to the industrialization, the bureaucratic organization that enabled mass genocide. The next scene in the text forces the reader to confront the larger scale of the Holocaust. Once returned to his group through the help of the Rebbe, the community continues its march and comes across the Hotel Amfortas. There, they are faced with a choice: cross the river to the seductive comforts of the hotel or continue on their journey. The Rebbe, who has acted as a guide, now

disappears; this is a choice that the community needs to make for themselves. When the boy, Pillow, crosses the river, his wounds are magically healed in the water. Seeing that, the rest of the community hurries to cross the river. Shedding the physical reminders of their deaths, the community goes into the hotel and find themselves reunited with their families. This scene marks a deliberate departure from the intergenerational deathlife narrative that Skibell uses through the bulk of the text. By restoring the Jews to life (and they can now breathe, taste, and eat), the presence of their death seemingly is washed away by the river.

The episode at the Hotel Amfortas forces the reader to face the appalling question: "How can one trick those who've experienced the horrors of the Holocaust to go willingly to their deaths again?" The hotel is a trap; even as the staff feeds and cares for its Jewish guests, they are scheduling them for "the steam." The horrific truth is that the staff is killing their guests and baking them—the hotel is a parallel for the concentration camp. If this text is meant to represent gehenna than the damage that the book is addressing is not just the damage done to Chaim's soul but to the soul of the world. The fact that the Holocaust continues to exist, continues to repeat itself in this space that limns reality speaks to the affect of the Holocaust itself. The absolute wrongness of the Holocaust breaks through reality and such an event leaves a mark. One could certainly argue that Skibell might continue to feel the affect of the Holocaust through the absence that exists in his family. That Chaim (Skibell's self-reflexive link to the Holocaust) is the center of this liminal space of the story marks Skibell's perspective that the Holocaust also continues to exist, that this wrong

transcends its physical manifestation, indicating the intergenerational affect that centers the response. As in the excerpt from Agamben at the beginning of this chapter, Skibell's purpose in depicting the Holocaust as an event that continues to cycle is not an attempt to depict Chaim as reliving the event in order to gain agency or control over what occurred. The seductive nature of the hotel Amfortas as a means to lure the survivors back into the cycle resists that formulation. While the Jews certainly had a choice to not cross the river, the bureaucracy of the hotel—the unseeable nature of the trap—does not give Chaim control. Instead, Skibell's depiction of the affective cycle of the holocaust invokes what Agamben later remarks in discussing Primo Levi: "And yet for [Levi], the impossibility of wanting Auschwitz to return for eternity has another, different root, one which implies a new, unprecedented ontological consistency of what has taken place. *One cannot want Auschwitz to return for eternity, since in truth it has never ceased to take place; it is always already repeating itself*" (101). While one may (and should) argue that the experience of repetition is very different for Levi as opposed to the intergenerational witness, the cycle of repeating the Holocaust in Skibell's text speaks to the affect of the Holocaust being felt through generations—deathlife for the intergenerational witness speaks to the idea that the horror exists in present day life. In the process of revivification, the intergenerational witness re-presents the Holocaust.[6]

Unlike the scene where the head asks for Chaim's forgiveness, there is not sense of remorse at the Hotel Amfortas. In truth, is any really possible? The cycle that recreates the concentration camp is also the cycle that allows the

perpetrators to continue with the killing, even past their original deaths. The damage to the soul exists everywhere. As horrific as this repetition is, it also structurally mirrors the role of the intergenerational witness: "As Dina Wardi describes in the therapeutic discussion of the second generation, *Memorial Candles*, this repetition of the original event represents the unconscious role the second-generation survivor plays in the family. He is forced to compulsively "return to the Holocaust," to relive it in order to once again survive it and to attempt to come to terms with and understand his parent's feelings of loss, guilt, and suffering" (McGlothlin 61-62). In using the Hotel Amfortas as a representation of the camp experience, Skibell invokes both the horror and the distance of the intergenerational witness. In some ways, the seduction of the hotel is meant as a means for allowing the intergenerational witness entry into the event by drawing on a more accessible representation. In his discussion of magical realism, Eugene Arva notes, "Magical realism constitutes an attitude toward and a way of approaching reality—a reality that is rarely what it seems and is seldom perceived in the same way by subjects in different places or in different times" (68). The historical reality of the camp is not accessible to Skibell, nor is it accessible to other intergenerational witnesses. The use of magical realism, as a viewpoint into the past, allows the new addressor (Skibell) access:

> According to Jean-François Lyotard, "Modernity, in whatever age it appears, cannot exist without a shattering of belief and without discovery of the 'lack of reality' of reality, together with the invention of other realities" (77). The only word in Lyotard's

> statement whose accuracy I feel inclined to contest is "invention," for the simple reason that magical realism, a postmodern phenomenon *par excellence*, does not so much create new realities as re-create our own reality—often by pushing its limits, true, but even more often by enhancing its black holes, its inaccessible spaces. (Arva 69)

In becoming the new addressor, an aspect of the Holocaust is made apparent in Skibell's text; it allows the reader to enter into and face a horror of repetition—and a way of understanding the world that is not centered on forgetfulness or silence.

In this sense, Skibell is joined with other intergenerational Jewish writers who are seeking to revivify, to create a community of memory. By articulating the past, these writers find a sense of larger community:

> Not unlike artist Robert Smithson's earthwork *Spiral Jetty* (1970), they spiral back to the center, suggesting a counterclockwise return to the point of origin, and thus bear the defining traumatic imprint of diasporic rupture but attempts at suture as well, through a retelling and reconceptualizing of defining stories of a collective Jewish past. American Jewish literature, since its immigrant beginnings, arguably can be seen as a collective expression, an ongoing narrative of Jewish history, despite its deviations, its turnings, and its absences. For sometimes it takes a while—a generation, even—to return to and articulate the past, especially a

> past that contains within it some of the most monstrous and most transcendent moments of history. (Aarons 301)

The process of cycling backwards represents the give and take between the addressor and the addressee turned new addressor. In becoming a new addressor, the author is enabled to create a new affect. At the same time, there is also a movement forward: "The movement of the word in the Holocaust novel is a turning back, a teshuvah, a movement of return, response, and redemption. Yet it is also a movement forward, toward the yet-to-be" (Patterson 4). In the horror of the repetition invoked by Skibell through the Hotel Amfortas, the intergenerational reader feels the affect. Yet, Chaim, escapes and returns back to his death (after re-crossing the river). The familiar horror of the text, the awareness of Chaim's death through the damage to his body, emerges.

With the return of Chaim's deteriorated body, other returnings emerge as well, spiraling back to where the story began. Led by a voice on the wind, Chaim finds himself in his hometown. Again, time is slippery in the text since the town is now changed; instead of the familiar houses, Chaim finds new glass buildings, cars lining the streets, and airplanes in the sky. The return to Chaim's hometown marks a movement forward in the text. Throughout much of the novel, the moon is absent from the sky (almost immediately following the death of Chaim and the other villagers). Skibell also presents the readers with a reoccurring story of how to Hasids pulled the moon from the sky. The first occurs when Chaim tells it to Ola as a bedtime story; the second repetition appears when the head of the German soldier tells Chaim the story, claiming that he was a witness to the two

Hasids rising up in the sky. In the final repetition, the reader meets the two Hasids at the center of the tale: Zalman and Kalman. In this final repetition, Chaim's purpose is revealed; he is meant to help the Hasids return the moon to the sky.

So, what does the returning of the Moon to the sky denote for the text? Stadden notes, "The Moon is of course the most encompassing symbol in the book. When it falls from the sky, it becomes evident that *this* is the most important struggle in the book. It is not, surprisingly, the conflict between the Jews and the Nazis. It is the salvation of this life symbol that reinforces the integrity of the character and his quest to return the moon to its rightful place" (156). At the same time, the disappearance of the moon is tied specifically to the Holocaust in the book since it is buried underneath a mass grave of Jews. Indeed, the moon itself is marked with the mass destruction since it as drawn the blood from the bodies into itself and is riddled with bullet holes (Skibell 253-54). Critics such as Alan Berger make a direct connection between the moon and the Jewish people: "Just as that celestial body waxes and wanes, so too do the fortunes of the Jewish people.… The fact that Chaim is able to raise the moon symbolizes the possibility that Jewish history—despite the trauma of the Holocaust—has not come to an end" (154). In looking at these two critics, one can see the moon through multiple signifieds: a general symbol of life and as a specific symbol of Jews (or even Israel). In returning the moon, the story implies a resolution to the damage that has been done to the soul of the world.

This is only one level that the returning of the moon offers the reader of the text. While it is certainly a significant symbol, the context of the story—the tale of the two Hasids who pull down the moon—is even more essential to understanding the story. In this final returning, this final spiral back to the center, we are presented with the idea of storytelling. The resolution of the story—of undoing the damage that greed and war and death has caused—there is a return to specifically Jewish culture: "Responding to the trauma of the Holocaust, Skibell's novel embraces the cosmos of stories and folklore which, by utilizing the supernatural, defies at least momentarily the murder of the Jewish people and the indifference of the world" (Berger 155). Chaim's ability to finally enter the World to Come lies squarely on his participation in the story. Thus he moves from the initial storyteller to the key participant in the text. From the moment that Zalman and Kalman pull down the moon, they wait 50 years for Chaim to appear—waiting, as they are instructed to do by the Rebbe:

> "The Rebbe took me aside, Reb Chaim, and this he said to me: 'When Reb Chaim arrives, he will hate you bitterly. He will pretend to enjoy the Shabbas, but all the time he will be longing to get away.' He said, 'He will give you the compass, but he will refuse to accompany you. However, you must insist upon it. You must tell him there is no choice, much is at stake, including the World to Come.'" (Skibell 228)

By entering the story and undoing the damage that was done to the world, Chaim finally has a chance to repair the damage done to his soul. The reappearance of the Rebbe, returned again to his human form, ties Chaim's redemption to faith:

> "We don't always understand God's ways," the Rebbe is saying. "But that is our failing, not His."
>
> His voice is clear, like the sound of moving waters.
>
> "I have tried my best to assist you but, of course, there were things you had to do on your own. You have done these things now, Chaim. You have done the necessary things. Don't try to understand them." (Skibell 265)

Since faith and culture and identity merge at the center, back to the point of origin, the role of the folktale is as important as the symbolism of the moon. By combining both symbol and story to Chaim's redemption, Skibell indicates a healing through a return to Jewish culture and belief.

There is another layer to add to the discussion of the importance of the folktale to the resolution of the story. After all, is not another story teller present throughout the text? By using his great grandfather as the protagonist of the story, Skibell as self-reflexively referred to his position as writer and intergenerational witness throughout the whole text. The connection between the Chaim's redemption and Skibell's writing is also inferred from the fact that it is 50 years since Chaim died that he finally finds resolution and healing—roughly the same time as when Skibell is writing the book. In the act of revivifying his great grandfather, in giving voice to the absence in his family, Skibell himself

serves an important part in the resolution through storytelling. As Margalit notes, "The comparison between the God who remembers man and the mother who remembers the child of her womb is interesting. In Hebrew the words *rehem* (womb) and *rahamim* (mercy) stem from the same root. Mercy is returning those who are far away to their source, the womb. Hence, the act of remembering is an act of mercy and grace" (Margalit 189). In remembering, in giving voice to those who can no longer speak, Skibell's act of writing is also part of the resolution of the folktale and an act of mercy for his great grandfather.

The final scene of the text when Chaim finally reaches the World to Come is through the reunion with his mother: "I am lying on her square and enormous lap. Her black hair is wild and untied, it falls into her face, a face I know, but which I have never seen so young" (Skibell 267). Here, the connection between "mercy" and "womb" are established through the final passage; Chaim's journey is through the mother. As Grimwood notes, "Survival is a continuation of the maternal—it is a second birth, the birth of memory. The 'unbirth' at the end of the novel represents a return to the very heart of that which was (supposed to have been) annihilated" (101). Skibell's role as addressor allows for the birth of memory through the self-reflexive act of writing the text. It is only when the story has a new addressor, when the absence is filled with a voice that Chaim can finally end his time in gehenna. The damage to his soul is undone.

While the self-reflexive nature of the text is less marked than, say, Spiegelman's or Foer's works, it does strongly connect to the idea of Jewish

culture. In this sense, Spiegelman is like other intergenerational witnesses who write from the moment in which their family history is torn apart:

> Second-Generation literature thus mourns the dead with its own metaphorical rendering of the *keri'ah*, the marking of memory in the evocation of rupture. At the same time, by using their writing to express the fracture caused by the Holocaust, second-generation writers forge a link to Jewish mourning ritual, reinscribing their murdered family into both personal and Jewish memory and effecting a sort of repair of their torn legacy. (McGlothlin 24)

Revivification of those who are lost allows a repair; in Skibell's text, it is tied to Jewish culture, storytelling, and the act of telling the story. In order to continue to have an affect on new addressees, new addressors must emerge. At the same time, Skibell does not idealize his ancestor. In giving Chaim serious flaws, Skibell also allows the reader to examine the banality of evil—to see its connections to ourselves through the identification and sympathy the reader has to Chaim. The two threads of the story, the self-reflexive addressor and the commentary on the banality of evil, work together throughout the text to force the reader into a deeper reflection on the meaning of the Holocaust by considering our relationship to both the victims and to the attitudes that made such widespread genocide possible. In that way, we are asked to consider what damage has been done to our own souls.

Notes:

[1]Even though Skibell is not technically a member of the second-generation, his experiences as a child do reflect many characteristics of those of the second-generation, particularly in the absence of family relatives. In addition, Skibell's relationship with his grandfather and great uncles as he was growing up represents a similar environment in that he had close contact with them.

[2]I should note here that I have some trepidation with using the term deathlife, especially given the type and trauma of the memories that are evoked with the term. In appropriating the term, do I risk minimalize the experiences of Holocaust survivors who talk about their experiences as passing through death…and that the experience of death continues to permeate their lives? And yet, second generation writers such as Skibell and Foer write narratives that evoke a similar position, just as their lives (with a little more separation) is marked by the deaths among their families. Indeed, the appropriation of the term (by distancing the experiences of the first generation witness) truly invokes the struggle of the intergenerational witness.

[3]Even now, there are ongoing cases to recover property as it evidenced by the 2009 returns of Klimt artwork to two Jewish families (The Bloch-Bauer and Munk).

[4]In *Using and Abusing the Holocaust*, Langer talks about witnessing several trials of accused Nazi war criminals and the lack of remorse for their actions (82-6). As he notes, this type of feeling is unlikely given the context of the courtroom, but there is a sense of dissatisfaction with the absolute denial of responsibility or guilt on behalf of the defendants. Here, Skibell gives the reader some measure of satisfaction though this open acknowledgement.

[5]Given Simon Wiesenthal's prominence as a Nazi hunter after the war, it is not unlikely that Skibell would have heard of this story. Of course, the question of whether this is a direct influence (or a part of an aggregate set of influences as we've seen in other parts of his text) can only be answered by Skibell.

[6]Whether it is the cartoon images of Spiegelman or film versions such as Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, the fact that representations of the Holocaust continue to emerge throughout intergenerational witnesses indicates an ongoing cycle. The Holocaust is not simply locked into historical footage or photographs; rather, the intergenerational witness presents a vision of the historical event that speaks to the affective response felt in becoming a new addressor.

CHAPTER 5

REVISING THE MESSAGE: ADAPTING JONTHAN SAFRAN FOER'S *EVERYTHING IS ILLUMINATED* FROM TEXT TO FILM

> **Colonel Landa:** "The other mistake the German soldier makes is their severe handling of the citizens who give shelter and aid to the Jews. These citizens are not enemies of the state. They are simply confused people, trying to make some sense out of the madness war creates. These citizens do not need punishing. They simply need to be reminded of their duty in war time.
>
> Let's use you as an example Monsieur LaPadite. In this war, you have found yourself in the middle of a conflict that has nothing to do with yourself, your lovely ladies, or your cows - yet, here you are.
>
> So Monsieur LaPadite, let me propose a question. In this time of war, what is your number one duty? Is it to fight the Germans in the name of France to your last breath? Or, is it to harass the occupying army to the best of your ability? Or, is it to protect the poor unfortunate victims of warfare who cannot protect themselves?
>
> Or, is your number one duty in this time of bloodshed, to protect those very beautiful women who constitute your family?"
>
> (pause)
>
> "That was a question Monsieur LaPadite. In this time of war, what do you consider your number one duty?"
>
> **Perrier: "**To protect my family."
>
> -Quentin Tarantino, *Inglorious Basterds*

Like other intergenerational witnesses to the Holocaust, such as Joseph Skibell and Art Spiegelman, Jonathan Safran Foer experiences Holocaust memories and the discourse arising from that experience through both the larger culture and his personal family. Yet, as is often the case with second and third generation witnesses (children/grandchildren of Holocaust survivors), Foer's role as an addressee of Holocaust discourse is mainly through silence, especially from

his grandfather. In his trip to uncover his grandfather's history in the Ukraine, Foer says, "Armed with a photograph of the woman who, I was told, had saved my grandfather from the Nazis, I embarked on a journey to Trachimbrod, the shtetl of my family's origins. The comedy of errors lasted five days. I found nothing but nothing, and in that nothing — a landscape of completely realized absence — nothing was to be found." (Foer interview).

It is this absence—this nothingness—that motivates Foer to write *Everything Is Illuminated* as a way to fill the void. In the layers of storytelling within Foer's text, he puts this need to fill an absence into the mind of Safran, the character based on his grandfather: "…because he knew that the origin of a story is always absence, and he wanted her to live among presences" (230). Like Skibell and Spiegelman, Foer utilizes a self-reflexive structure in his text that refers back to himself through the character of Jonthan Safran Foer (hereafter referred to as Jonathan) and through the metafictional narrative structure that calls attention to the act of writing. In this way, the self-reflexive nature of the text lies between Spiegelman's autobiographical discourse and Skibell's invocation of family by basing his character on his great grandfather. Like Skibell, Foer's novel (and the movie based on it) picks up an aspect of Lawrence Langer's idea of deathlife narratives.

In Langer's discussion of the "choiceless choice" of a young man on the forced march from Auschwitz to Bergen-Belsen who is forced to leave his uncle on the road, Langer notes that "this episode depicts a pivotal grim principle of the camp universe: no one's survival can be separated from the unnatural death of

someone else" (*Using and Abusing the Holocaust* 102). In this sense, the deathlife narrative can be marked by the unnatural deaths of others, which somehow allowed the witness to survive. If one begins to look at this aspect of the deathlife narrative from the position of the intergenerational witness, the questions of the link between existence and unnatural death exist. For the character of Jonathan in the text, his life is possible because his grandfather's, Safran's, first wife and child were killed (59). They also exist for Alex since his grandfather's (in the novel) survival is ensured by turning in his best friend.

As Foer passes on Holocaust discourse through his role as a new addressor, he seeks to revivify the essence of Holocaust memory in two ways: to bring to life the people (specifically his family line) of Trachimbrod through recreating their history and by addressing the concept of the banality of evil in both the historical and the present day narrative arcs of the text. In Liev Schreiber's adaptation of the text, the film version only focuses on the present-day narrative of the trip made by the character of Jonathan, Alex (his guide), and Alex's grandfather. The choice to focus on only one of the story arcs from the book is understandable. However, in writing the adaptation, Schreiber changes the history of Alex's grandfather and thus his character. In doing so, the focus on the Banality of Evil from the text is lost, a choice that releases the audience from facing one of the brutal facts of the Holocaust—that the choices we make can potentially lead us to participate in widespread evil.

The novel *Everything is Illuminated* is split into three narrative parts: one half of an epistolary novel (since we only see the fictional Alex's letters to

Jonathan); a narrative history of Trachimbrod beginning March 18, 1791 and running through the shtel's destruction by the Nazis during WWII (which Jonathan is writing and sending to Alex); and Alex's narrative of the history of their journey in the present-day to find the woman, Augustine, who Jonathan believes saved his grandfather during WWII. For the purposes of this discussion, we will begin with Jonathan's history of Trachimbrod. In real life, Foer travels to the Ukraine only to find resistance and silence in his search for the past. This absence is connected with a painful history of Ukrainian collaboration and, in some cases, active participation.[1] The narrative history of Trachimbrod also represents writing into absence, given that many eastern Jewish communities were completely destroyed during the war. Unlike Skibell who focuses mainly on the destruction of family history, Foer writes to revivify a community as well as a family line.

In writing the history of the community, Foer is invoking a sense of naming that is similar to what we've seen in Jean François Lyotard proposes in *Just Playing* (as discussed in Chapter 1): the subject of the enunciation makes no claims of autonomy with respect to his discourse. On the contrary, both through his name and through the story he tells, he claims to belong to the tradition (33). Just as the role of naming plays an instrumental role in the establishment of communal history for the Cashinahua, naming invokes Foer as addressor through the inscription of family/community history—even as this history is obviously fictionalized. The impulse to create shared history as has roots in Judaism: "The Biblical obligation to tell the story of the exodus from bondage as a condition of

continuity has proved stronger than public memorials and official discourse, especially when the visible ruins of an ancient culture stand as mute archaeological artifacts or museum exhibits, and sites of memory have been neglected, destroyed or altered" (Sicher 60-61). While Foer was never able to find the shetl of his family (and Foer admits that his journey was not well planned) and, thus, no physical sites of memory in the Ukraine, the idea of narrative to establish a "condition of continuity" in the face of muteness, can certainly be applied in this text.[2]

The history of Trachimbrod, as it appears in the text provides a line of continuity between the beginning of the shetl (at least, the origin of it as it is connected to Foer) to its destruction. In his discussion of the Trachimbrod history as a series of allegories, critic Menachem Feuer notes, "The first allegory deals with what I will call the allegory of the origin—the construction of meaning out of fragments or the gathering of fragments" (Feuer 37). The event that marks the origin on March 18, 1791 is when Trachim's wagon overturns and sinks into the river Brod. As the townspeople look on, various items emerge from the bottom of the river: an umbrella, gloves, white string, food, and…a baby. As Feuer notes, the origin of the Trachimbrod history begins with tragedy—the wreckages floating in the river are like the fragments that Foer must piece together into a (fragmented) narrative (38). The trauma of the origin also mirrors the trauma that ends the shetl with a signal difference: the baby born to Jonathan's grandfather's wife Zosha at the end of the Trachimbrod history is born in the river but dies—the event that allows Jonathan to exist since Jonathan is a descendent of his

grandfather's second marriage. The use of this tragedy as the starting point of the history of the shetl is significant as well in the context of naming. Jonathan's maternal ancestor is the baby born in the river among the wreckage of the wagon accident, Brod. Thus, the narrative of continuity involves the naming of ancestors and the creation of a family line. Yet, the naming also invokes the community since Trachimbrod is the combination of Trachim and Brod—a naming that emerges in the tragedy since Trachim's body is never recovered from the river.[3] The final level of the naming exists as an evocation of space—Jonathan's ancestor bears the name of the river, Brod. The role of naming in this origin establishes firmly the personal and the communal in the intergenerational transmission of memory.

The parallels between the origin of the Trachimbrod history and its final destruction have another link—one that speaks to the very easy nature of the banality of evil. If we can read the origin of Trachimbrod as an allegory, than it teaches how very easy it is to refuse aid. When Yankel (who later becomes Brod's guardian) reaches the scene of Trachim's accident, he tries to figure out what happened. The only eyewitness of the accident appears to be Sofiowka:

> *Are we sure he's dead?* someone asked.
>
> *Quite*, Sofiowka assured. *Dead as he was before his parents met. Or deader, maybe, for then he was a least a bullet in his father's cock and an emptiness in his mother's belly.*
>
> *Did you try to save him?* Yankel asked.
>
> *No.*

Although Yankel eventually dives into the water, it is far too late to save Trachim who is actually never found (the search for Trachim becomes a yearly ritual throughout the following history of the shetl). The rawness of that "No" echoes later in the text when, in the present-day (Alex's) narrative, Lista, the only surviving member of the Trachimbrod shootings, describes her survival after a German soldier shoots up into her womb, killing her unborn child: "'She escaped, yes?' 'Yes.' 'Someone saved her?' 'No. She knocked on one hundred doors, and not one of them opened'" (Foer 188). Just as there is a failure to act to rescue Trachim and, very probably, his pregnant wife given the appearance of the newborn, Brod, "still mucus-glazed," the town's descendants will perish as witnesses look on but do not help. Like in Skibell's *Blessing on the Moon*, Foer chooses to emphasize the humanity and fallibility of his characters through a commentary on the banality of evil. In this way, he forecasts the eventual revelation in the text of the truth of Alex's grandfather's experiences during the war.

The early scene of the Trachimbrod history is important in terms of establishing Jonthan's origin and position as an intergenerational witness. Yet, it is important to note that the history of Trachimbrod section of the novel is not meant to be read as historically factual since it heavily utilizes fantastical elements: "In Foer's novel, the magical-realist and folklorist-based material is a self-conscious device for imagining the past, but one which always announces the gap between itself and the past *as it was experienced*" (Behlman 60). That gap is precisely the position of Foer's intergenerational witnessing. "In confining the

fantastic elements of the text to a narrative strand concerned with a historical dark area, the novel draws a clear distinction between those areas of the past which are accessible as objects of knowledge (the personal histories of Alex and Jonathan, and Alex's grandfather's Holocaust experience) and those of which imagination is the only source (the history of Trachimbrod)" (Adams 62). Jonathan's Trachimbrod section is not meant to usurp a history but to fill in absence since any record of that community is completely gone. This aligns with Efraim Sicher's idea of "absent memory": "'Absent memory' might be a trope for much writing that is impelled by the violent eradication of a past culture or of an entire generation so that 'invention replaces recall.' However, children of survivors who grew up hearing their parent's memories of their birthplaces might equally sense an exilic diaspora in an imagined but far from empty memory that for them constitutes a viable Jewish identity" (Sicher 64). In Foer's work, absent memory invokes everything that was not found in Foer's visit to the Ukraine. As we look at absent memory in the Trachimbrod history, the idea of "invention" is fundamental since the reader is never allowed to forget that the history is the product of Jonathan's imagination. The folkloric elements invoke a tradition of storytelling that constantly reminds the reader of the fictionality of this section even as another level of the text, Alex's letters to Jonathan, metafictively discuss the process of the writing itself.

One aspect of invention that Foer repeatedly plays with through the Trachimbrod history section is time, specifically compressing time so that as he tells the story of his ancestor, Brod, her life is limned by Safran's story as well as

the destruction of the shtetl. The same is true for Safran as parts of his story are told through Brod's recounting of a dream. In Brod's section of the story, this becomes apparent as she looks through a telescope into different rooms and sees into the future. Mainly, this sight is limited to Trachimbrod although Foer is careful not to confine it to just Trachimbrod since one room invokes a period of time after the destruction of the shtetl: "She tries to piece it [the room as a puzzle] together: A half-smoked cigarette balancing itself on an ashtray's lip. A damp washcloth on the sill. A scrap of paper on the desk, with handwriting that looks like hers: *This is me with Augustine, February 21, 1943*" (Foer 88). The family link functions as the link between Brod and the future since the spatial link by this point is destroyed. If it is Safran she is looking at, he has already left the shtetl. If it is Jonathan, than she is looking at the person who is creating her through his writing about Trachimbrod.

In the next area Brod looks into, she sees a young boy (who may or may not be Safran as a child) on a roof with a young girl reading *The Book of Antecendents*.[4] Brod, through the telescope that is bridging time, reads a section from the community written book that describes her rape by Sofiowka N, including the day on which it occurs. However, she is unable to read the complete section since the boy falls asleep: "Brod wants to read more—to scream, READ TO ME! I NEED TO KNOW!—but they can't hear her from where she is, and from where she is, she can't turn the page. From where she is, the page—her paper-thin future—is infinitely heavy" (Foer 89). The compressing of time allows her a glimpse of her personal future that is terrifying but incomplete;

realistically, this is not knowledge that she could possess in a linear view of time. However, Brod's story does not exist within linear time, at least, not one that is accessible since any trace of that history is lost. In this text, Brod's story exists because of the absence of a real history of Trachimbrod. Thus, any sense of time begins and ends with the storyteller; the compression of time throughout this section of Brod's story illustrates a metafictive device that calls attention to the role Jonthan plays as the storyteller.

The implicit invocation of Jonthan as the storyteller continues into the next chapter, which covers the day when Brod becomes Float Queen at the Trachimday festival, named for Brod's biological father and including a reenactment of his drowning and the act of finding items from his wagon—including Brod herself—in the river (although the divers search for bags of gold). This is the day on which Brod knows she will be raped although she does nothing that will change that event. Yet, the act of violence is alluded to rather than shown. The strongest indicator that the reader is given is in the passage when she returns home from the festival: "She ignored them all. Ignored them when they spat at her feet or pinched her backside. Ignored them when they cursed and kissed her, and cursed her with their kisses. Ignored them even when they made a woman out of her, ignored them as she had learned to ignore everything in the world that was not once-removed" (Foer 96). Rather than depicting her rape, the violence is deflected, buried in the general idea of "being made a woman." By glossing over her rape, it feels as if Jonathan is trying to spare the character of Brod from the experience of the rape itself. Instead, the chapter ends with Brod's

discovery of her adopted father's death and her connection to the Kolker (later named Safran), who will become her husband. Her emotional connection to the Kolker emits a light that can be seen in space (a light similar to but brighter than the light that is emitted through the act of lovemaking discussed earlier in the chapter) by the first astronauts, an event Jonathan is listening to over the radio with his mother and grandmother. In this way, the linking of Brod and the Kolker, Jonathan's ancestors, is central to Jonathan's existence and the two acts merge through another compression of time.

Even though Jonathan passes over Brod's rape at this point in the story, he does develop a fuller description of the event later when her descendent, Safran, reads *The Book of Antecedents*. Rather than forcing the character to go through the event, the story is witnessed by someone else—one whose existence is tied to that event and its aftermath. The predatory nature of Sofiowka, his use of power over Brod, and the violence of the act are displayed in this version of the story. In addition to a fuller focus on Brod's rape, the ending of the story is extended. In the first recounting of that night, the story ends with a generative energy; in this depiction of the event, the story ends in death. When Brod agrees to marry the Kolker, she has a price:

> *Then you must do something for me*, she said.
>
> Sofiowka was found the next morning, swinging by the neck from the wooden bridge. His severed hands were hanging from strings tied to his feet, and across his chest was written, in Brod's red lipstick: A N I M A L. (Foer 205)

In terms of the family line descending to Jonathan, the marriage of Brod and the Kolker is the origin. Yet, the life that is enabled through their joining is marked by a brutal murder. In this sense, the deathlife narrative is evoked in Safran's reading of Brod's rape; his life exists through the unnatural death of Sofiowka.

In reading this story of Brod's rape as an invocation of the deathlife narrative, it is important to note that this is a much more stylized and broader version than what Langer discusses in *Using and Abusing the Holocaust*. In Langer's discussion, the context of life and death is completely different since the ability for the survivors to control their circumstances is gone. While one's life in the Holocaust is marked be someone else's unnatural death, the survivor's ability to control—to act—is minimal. Here, the Kolker has a choice: to kill Sofiowka and marry Brod or not. Foer's use of the deathlife narrative is stylized since it serves to create a parallel structure in the text; just as Safran's life is determined by the unnatural death of Sofiowka, Brod's life is determined by the unnatural deaths of the Jewish population of Trachimbod. Or, more specifically, the life of her character since it is the unnatural deaths of Jonathan's grandfather's first wife and child that make this story possible: "The oblique telling can only 'speak' the narrative truth of history when this historical context is the space that both frames and conditions its signification" (Adams 72). Just as Safran is used as the vehicle to show Brod's rape and the murder of Sofiowka, Brod is used to show the destruction of the shtetl. Again, this could be read as an unwillingness to force the characters through these events of trauma. However, it also establishes a cyclical link between Safran and Brod, one that compresses time to the act of

writing the story, this time in *The Book of Recurrent Dreams*. It is Brod's dream from the perspective of herself and as the river, entitled "*The dream of the end of the world*," that tells the account of Zosha's death as Trachimbrod is attacked during the Trachimday festival:

> …my safran picked up his wife and carried her like a newlywed into the water which seemed amid the falling trees and hackling crackling explosions the safest place hundreds of bodies poured into the brod that river with my name I embraced them with open arms come to me come I wanted to save them all to save everybody from every-body the bombs rained from the sky and it was not explosions or scattering shrapnel that would be our death not the heckling cinders not the laughing debris but all the bodies bodies flailing and grabbing hold of one another… (Foer 272).

The stream of consciousness passage continues on, describing in graphic detail Zosha's giving birth in the river and the drowning death of both Zosha and her newborn daughter amid all the bodies fighting for escape in the river. Menachem Feuer talks of this scene as a signal that Jonathan is unable to forgive what happened: "At the very end of this account is a recorded dream, taken from the *Book of Recurrent Dreams*: a dream of apocalypse. This is nothing less than Jonathan's assertion that he can neither forgive nor forget what happened, even if he has imagined it all, which indeed is the case. (This is not simply an ironic viewpoint; it delimits an essential difference between Jonathan and Alex, and it repeats Eli Wiesel's imperative to 'never forget')" (43-44). Yet, if this is

Jonathan's declaration against forgiving or forgetfulness (a statement which itself disregards the differences between the both actions), why present it as a dream? The act of recording is significant, but if the reality of this history is confined to a recounting of a dream, then what happens to the idea of "never forget"? Again, the key is the invocation of Jonathan as the writer, the point from which the narrative goes out and to whom the narrative must return.

The cyclical nature and compression of time between the beginning and ending of Trachimbrod's history serve to invoke the point of destruction which makes both the storytelling imperative just as it also makes the position of Jonathan as writer possible. Yet, Jonthan's relationship to his characters is often complex, especially since he portrays his characters as incredibly flawed. From the beginning of the Trachimbrod history when all the bystanders wait too long before going into the water to rescue Trachim (and the townspeople have no hand in bringing Brod up to surface) to Brod's rape to the Kolker's murder and Jonathan's grandfather's sexual exploits (including infidelity), the residents of Trachimbrod are not treated as good or pure. Indeed, their motivations are often selfish and common—in some case, banal. Just as Joseph Skibell depicts his great grandfather as flawed, so too does Jonathan in his history of Trachimbrod, a point that Alex's letters call attention to: "*How can you do this to your grandfather, writing about his life in such a manner? Could you write in this manner if he was alive? And if not, what does that signify?*" (Foer 178). This point is significant since it calls attention to the act of choice in writing—to the fact that is one is seeking to invoke a community of memory, than why does one

need to make that community so imperfect? Further in the same letter, Alex expands on this question:

> *We are being very nomadic with the truth, yes? The both of us? Do you think that this is acceptable when we are writing about things that occurred? If your answer is no, then why do you write about Trachimbrod and your grandfather in the manner that you do, and why do you command me to be untruthful? If your answer is yes, then this creates another question, which is if we are to be such nomads with the truth, why do we not make the story more premium than life?* (Foer 179).

Fundamentally, the answer lies in the need to tell the story truthfully, in the sense that this is an exploration of complex human beings who are both good and bad. Jonathan refuses to change the story for Alex, just as Alex resists Jonathan's desire to edit out scenes that are embarrassing. Jonathan, however, in creating a history that no longer exists, has more power over the choices he makes.

Jonathan's choices to show the flaws of Trachimbrod pose a real dilemma for Alex—one that moves him to anger even as it also aids Alex in understanding Jonathan's position. As Feuer notes, "In short, Jonathan's writing introduces transgression and confusion into Alex's life. It ruins his concept of love and truth and makes him, in some way, 'mad'" (42). To be more precise, it ruins Alex's *fantasy* of love and truth as simple concepts and forces him on a path of self-reflexivity that finally allows him to openly talk about his family's history—to talk not only about his grandfather's actions in the war but to also acknowledge

the abuse he has been living with from his father. The ideals of love and truth rely on simplicity; the human reality is wrought with complexity. Francisco Collado-Rodriguez points out that the Trachimbrod history is essential to Alex's understanding of the Holocaust and the communities that were destroyed:

> With the referential power of language at stake thanks to Alex's role as an alledgedly realist narrator, the fantastic elements that saturate Jonathan's story of Trachimbrod's mythical creation and destruction turn into a powerful strategy with ethical implications. Foer builds a narrative structure in which myth and fantasy end up helping readers—and eventually Alex himself—to come to a better understanding of the unsayable traumatic events that are gradually disclosed in Alex's reports rather than in Jonathan's.
>
> Paradoxically, Jonathan's magic-realist passages eventually bring illumination to the historical darkness that pervades Alex's letters and Alex's story. The issue at stake is no small matter, since it poses the question of the ways in which the narration of myth and magic can illuminate historical events characterized by referential uncertainty. (57).

In the text, the absence of any history of Trachimbrod marks the point of a differend—one that Jonathan seeks to overcome through narration.[5] Instead of leaving it as an absence, Jonathan creates a presence in the text. The complexity of that presence, however, does not just "bring illumination to historical darkness" although that is certainly an important aspect of Jonathan's narration. On a subtle

level, it signals Jonathan's understanding of Alex's grandfather's choice. Trachimbrod's existence, the very act of its naming, rests on the fact that no one acted to save Trachim, which mirrors the destruction that marks the end of the Jewish community in Trachimbrod that the reader sees so painfully in both Augustine/Lista's recounting in Alex's narration and Brod's dream in Jonathan's. In a different context and time, would the people Jonthan depicts be capable of making a different decision than what Alex's grandfather made? Jonathan's history makes that possibility highly questionable, although that ultimately does little to spare Alex the pain, the feeling of complicity that he has, when he finally learns what his grandfather did in the war.

Whatever Jonathan's internal struggles are with writing the story or his reactions to Alex's narrative, the reader only sees them if Alex himself comments on them. Thus, the primary (and most obvious) use of metanarrative in the text falls into Alex's sections, both his letters to Jonathan and his narration of the present-day journey Jonathan, Alex, and Alex's grandfather take to uncover the remains of Trachimbrod and find Augustine, the woman who, Jonathan believes, rescued Safran during the war. The use of metanarrative is multi-layered throughout Alex's section since he functions as both narrator and translator. It is the latter one that needs the most explanation; it is also Alex's role as a translator that brings him into direct contact in a very personal way.

One key passage in the text is when Alex is translating for Jonathan Lista's account of the deaths of the Jews of Trachimbrod. Of all the characters in the novel, she is the one who is most defined by the theme of deathlife. Lista

lives in a house, surrounded by belongings she has gathered from all the Jews who died in Trachimbrod as well as mementos that invoke the neighboring town of Kolki and, thus, Alex's grandfather's history. Even though years have passed, Lista is still trapped in the past through her isolation—one that is so complete that she does not even know if the war has ended (Foer 193). When Lista, Jonathan, Alex, and Alex's grandfather arrive in Trachimbrod, Lista recounts the actions of the Nazis who did not merely destroy the synagogue and kill the Jews; the Nazis forced the town to participate in the desecration of the Torah. In translating these events, Alex says, "You cannot know how it felt to have to hear these things and then repeat them, because when I repeated them, I felt like I was making them new again" (Foer 185).

As he becomes the translator of the events, Alex is coming to a more intimate understanding of what the Holocaust means. Even when Jonathan says "I don't want to hear anymore," Alex's translation continues as he narrates the rest of Lista's story. Throughout Lista's account, she does not specifically say what she herself went through; it is only at the end of the chapter that the reader (as well as Alex) comes to the realization that the account of her pregnant older sister, whose baby takes the bullet and spares the mother's life, is in fact Lista when she says "'I must go in and care for my baby,' she said. 'It is missing me'" (Foer 193). In that moment, the levels of Lista's deathlife are fully and awfully realized. It also parallels Alex's sensation of "making them new" since it becomes fully clear how traumatized Lista is by the Nazis since she transfers her experience onto the figure of her older sister, which allows her to continue with

the repression of the event that took her own child's life—a repression that keeps her trapped in the past. As Jenni Adams notes, "While not factually accurate by the criterion of correspondence, Lista's account enables her to communicate the experiential reality of the event, demonstrating the value of narrative truth in articulating experience which could not, as a result of its traumatic nature, be told in any more factually accurate way" (73). Yet, there are limits to the sense of experiential, as Lista herself says, "'It is not a thing that you can imagine. It only is. After that, there can be no imagining" (Foer 188). In his role as translator of the events, Alex seems to be aware of these limits, calling attention at times to his emotions but careful not to usurp Lista's position as witness.

The distinction between Alex's voice and his relationship to the role of the witness that he establishes in Lista's section of his narration is complicated when he is forced to face Alex's grandfather's choiceless choice. Alex's grandfather's section of the novel functions as both a deathlife narrative through the role of the perpetrator and as a view of the Banality of Evil, one that invites the reader's identification with his grandfather since it is difficult to imagine what one might choose in the same situation. That, however, does not lessen the guilt that Alex and his grandfather feel nor does it lessen the ongoing impact of that decision, which begins a cycle of violence that Alex decides to break. In the novel, there are two versions of the story of Alex's grandfather and Herschel. The first is in Lista's section:

> "Here is Herschel," she said, holding a photograph up to the light of the window. "We will go," Grandfather said. "tell him we are

> leaving." "Do not go," she said. "Shut up," he told her, and even if she was not Augustine, he still should not have uttered this to her. "I am sorry," I told her, "please continue." "He lived in Kolki, which was a shtetl near to Trachimbrod. Herschel and Eli were best friends, and Eli had to shoot Herschel, because if he did not, they would shoot him." "Shut up," he said again, and this time he also punched the table. But she did not shut up. "Eli did not want to, but he did it." "You are lying about it all." "He does not intend this," I told her, and I could not clutch why he was doing what he was doing. "Grandfather—" "You can keep your not-truths for yourself," he said. "I heard this story," she said, "and I believe it is a truth." (Foer 152)

By the time Alex is writing this story, he already knows the truth about Herschel and his grandfather although he chooses to focus on a realistic version of the give and take conversation that indicates Alex's grandfather's unwillingness to hear the story because he has not yet acknowledged that he pointed the finger at Herschel. There is also a subtlety hinted at in the text that both Feuer and Collado-Rodriguez draw attention to in their respective analyses of Foer's work: that if Grandfather is Eli than he is also Jewish. If true, this leads to an uncomfortable relationship to the theme of the Banality of Evil that exists in the text since it compresses victim with perpetrator.[6] At the same time, this possibility is called into question since Lista does not witness these events ("I heard this story") and the specific details do not match up with Grandfather's

telling of the event. Moreover, the heritage of the perpetrator is the theme that is ultimately stressed throughout the novel since this possibility is never developed into a significant plot point in the novel even though the idea of perpetrator (in the context of the choiceless choice) is also a victim is present.

The conflict between Lista and Alex's grandfather that marks the first telling of the story of Herschel brings to the foreground the idea of characters in conflict. The minor (in terms of the larger aims of the novel) conflict in this version addresses the silence that exists in the Ukraine:

> In the midst of the two conflicting literary modes is a plotline in which Augustine and Alex's grandfather must face each other. Only by confronting each other are they finally able to give voice to the persistent silence that for decades traumatically concealed the horror of the crime and the Ukrainian peasants' passivity, if not downright complicity, in the extermination of the Jews. In other words, the author's strategy of refraction (two stories that eventually collide in the same time span, two characters who need to face each other) aims at producing a critical debate on ethical matters. (Collado-Rodriguez 58).

Throughout Lista's sections, Alex's grandfather is often uncomfortable with Lista's bleak outlook: "'We were the not-lucky ones,' she said. 'It is not true,' Grandfather said, although I [Alex] do not know what part he was saying was not true'" (Foer 153). Since Lista's view is in opposition to the motives and result that guided Alex's grandfather's decision, he is unwilling to give this view

credence. In addition, the confrontation between Lista and Grandfather takes place outside of Alex's narration since he is asked to leave while Lista and Grandfather talk privately. The result of that conversation is a breaking of silence but only through Lista's testimony. Grandfather only recounts his story of Herschel's death when Jonathan pulls a photograph out of the "In Case" and recognizes Alex's grandfather. In this way, the refraction of the two characters is marked by the inescapability of the past.

The past as inescapable also marks Jonathan's and Alex's relationship, although it is more acknowledged in Alex's sections for both the obvious reason that Alex's letters are the only ones presented in the novel and the more complicated relationship Alex has to the past since the possibility of his life is marked by the unnatural death of Herschel. The ongoing realization that he cannot evade the past is the mark of his growth throughout the text: "The legacy of trauma effects the third, non-Jewish, generation. The maturing of Alex's own identity occurs over time and in stages" (Berger 156). The hesitations that interrupt Alex's narration are centered on his heritage as a perpetrator: "*I have been putting on a high shelf what I know I must do, which is point a finger at Grandfather pointing at Herschel*" (Foer 178). Silence, indeed, will be broken but there is an emotional cost involved. This is apparent when Alex finally comes to write the second version of Herschel's story, the one that his grandfather finally tells when confronted by the fact that both Jonathan and Alex recognize him in the photograph taken from Lista's box.

Alex's narration is split into two sections: the first leads to his grandfather's acknowledgement that he killed Herschel and the second is the fuller description of what happened the night the Nazis came to Kolki. It is in the first section that Alex struggles: "(Here it is too forbidding to continue. I have written to this point many times, and corrected the parts you would have me correct, and made more funnies, and more inventions, and written as if I were you writing this, but every time I try to persevere, my hand shakes so I can no longer hold my pen. Do it for me. Please. It is now yours.)" (Foer 226). Yet, the rest of the passage continues to be written as if it is from Alex's viewpoint including other parentheticals that seem to be from Alex's voice and using his wording. At the same time, this passage could be read as a metafictional device, calling attention to Foer's own role as the author. Throughout much of the text, Alex and Jonathan occupy differentiated positions: "The refracting position of the two young men provides Foer a means to not only establish a metafictional game, but also suggest literature's power to help his protagonists resolve the unnerving situation they have to face" (Collado-Rodriguez 56). In this sense, we see the possibility of a resolution to the differend enacted through the dual narratives since the possibility of both narrative voices becomes compressed at the metafictional site of the author's role in the creation of the work.

The fact of Alex's father's drinking and physical abuse of both Alex and his younger brother, Igor, is a significant theme in Alex's personal story. At first, he is unable to name the abuse for what it really is: "*It was Little Igor's fourteen birthday yesterday. He made his arm broken the day yore, because he fell again,*

this time from a fence he was hiking on, if you can believe it" (Foer 52). As Alex's voice matures, he begins to face the violence from his father: "*Sometimes I feel ensnared in this, as if no matter what I do, what will come has already been fixed. For me, OK, but there are things that I want for Little Igor. There is so much violence around him, and I mean more than merely the kind that occurs with fists. I do not want him to feel violence anymore, but also I do not want him to one day make others feel violence*" (Foer 145). Silence and shame work on multiple levels throughout Alex's story of his family and the abuse is the first to be acknowledged. The starting point of the cycle is not fully revealed until the second part of Alex's grandfather's story of Herschel towards the end of the novel and written as if Alex is quoting from Jonathan's diary entry:

> …and I knew I could never allow him to learn of whoIwas or whatIdid because it was for him that I didwhatIdid it was for him that I pointed and for him that Herschel was murdered that I murdered Herschel and this is why he is how he is he is how he is he because a father is always responsible for his son and I am I and Iamresponsible not for Herschel but for my son because I held him with somuchforcethathecried because I loved him so much that I madeloveimpossible and I am sorry for you and sorry for Iggy and it is you who must forgive me… (Foer 251-2).

Grandfather's choiceless choice comes when the Nazis round up all the citizens of Kolki and force the shtetl inhabitants to identify the Jews who are then rounded up into the synagogue. Just before the General comes to Alex's grandfather, the

previous two men who said there were no more Jews were shot in the head. As he stands there next to his wife and child on one side and his best friend, Herschel, on the other, Grandfather points to Herschel. The Nazis force Herschel into the synagogue, which they then set on fire. The legacy of that choice haunts Grandfather and makes it impossible for him to love. This is the legacy, defined by silence, which starts the cycle of abuse that Alex faces.

Just as Brod's dream is used as the device to depict the bombing of Trachimbrod, Alex's struggle with his father and his breaking of the cycle of violence inherited from his grandfather's choiceless choice are depicted by others rather than Alex himself. The first depiction is actually midway through the text when Alex is asked to leave Lista and Grandfather to talk. He goes outside with Jonathan and reads Jonathan's diary:

> He told his father that he could care for Mother and Little Igor. It took his saying it to make it true. Finally he was ready. His father could not believe this thing. What? he asked. What? And Sasha told him again that he would take care of the family, that he would understand if his father had to leave and never return, and that it would not even make him less of a father. He told his father that he would forgive. Oh, his father became so angry, so full of wrath, and he told Sasha that he would kill him, and Sasha told his father that he would kill him, and they moved at each other with violence and his father said, Say it to my face, not to the floor, and Sasha said, You are not my father. (Foer 160).

This passage, in its entirety, also appears in the final letter from the Ukraine that closes out the novel, the one Alex's grandfather wrote just before committing suicide. As Feuer points out, "The twist is that these words are clearly not the grandfather's, as he never saw Jonathan's diary, and the repetition of them is a postmodern literary device: it indicates the presence of the author, as well as the fictionality of this letter and the suicide" (44). Given the complete absence that Foer writes into, it illustrates his desire for memory, for a breaking of silence that he found in his visit to the Ukraine. So, is a legacy of the perpetrator a cycle of violence? In the end, it marks his belief that such a legacy has an impact, especially if that history is so completely repressed.

The metafictional device that calls attention to Foer at the end of the novel appears in a different form elsewhere in the novel—one that calls attention to similarity rather than difference. It is the idea that both Jonathan and Alex are working to form one story:

> *We are talking not, Jonathan, together, and not apart. We are with each other, working on the same story, and I am certain you also feel this. Do you know that I am the Gypsy girl and you are Safran, and that I am Kolker and you are Brod, and that I am your grandmother and you are Grandfather, and that I am Alex and you are you, and that I am you and you are me? Do you not comprehend that we can bring each other safety and peace?* (Foer 214).

The focus here is a type of compression, similar to the function of time in the Trachimbrod history. Alex's letter speaks to understanding, to the similarities rather than the differences—or at least a desire for that type of resolution to the differend. In this passage, the focus is more on the viewpoint of the victim. In the later compression that occurs in Grandfather's full retelling of his and Herschel's story, the focus is on the perpetrator:

> …the truth is that I also pointedatHerschel and I also said heisaJew and I will tell you that you also pointedatHerschel and you also said heisaJew and you also pointedathim and said heisaJew and your grandmother and Little Igor and we all pointedateachother so what is it he should have done hewouldhavebeenafooltodoanythingelse but is it forgivable…. (Foer 252)

While this is also Alex's section, the passage potentially comes from Jonathan's diary as well (although it could be a device Alex uses to make it possible to write). Yet, just as the viewer feels sympathy for Monsiuer LaPadite at the beginning of Quentin Tarantino's *Inglorious Basterds*, the reader here is asked the question, "What choice can one make?" As much as one would wish to be able to label every perpetrator as evil, the reality is much more complicated…and banal: "*Everything is Illuminated* represents the universal dimension of intergenerational transmission of trauma. Jews were the killers' obsession, but the lives of others were deeply etched by Nazism's evil. Foer's novel may in fact be read as a warning to humanity" (Berger 158). The warning is that the possibility of great

evil, given the right circumstances, can still happen, no matter the person. As Alex says in a letter to Jonathan, "*A bad person is someone who does not lament his bad actions. Grandfather is now dying because of his. I beseech you to forgive us, and to make us better than we are. Make us good*" (Foer 145). Is Alex talking to Jonathan or to Foer? The possibility of forgiveness is absent since the request is made out of a desire on the author's part—on his choice to give voice to the silence he encountered—not on any acknowledgement of guilt or responsibility by those who allowed the atrocities to happen.

Liev Schreiber's Adaptation of *Everything is Illuminated*

The questions of forgiveness and responsibility, especially in relation to Foer's use of the Banality of Evil is completely bypassed when one comes to look at the movie version of *Everything is Illuminated*. The film, directed by Liev Schreiber who also wrote the screenplay, focuses solely on the present-day narration of Alex, Alex's grandfather, and Jonathan's journey to find Trachimbrod. The purpose of this critique of the film is not to complain that a majority of the novel is cut out; it is impossible to include every aspect of a novel into a film, especially one as complicated as Foer's. As one looks at the film, the viewer can see how Schreiber cinematically tried to include multiple aspects from the book, including the fantastical, without destroying the realism of the story arc. One aspect of his use of folkloric elements appears in the shots of Augustine's house, standing alone in a field of sunflowers. When Alex and Jonathan first approach the house, all the flowers are standing up, alert. Later, as the story of Trachimbrod begins to emerge, the sunflowers droop. Another more significant

use of folkloric imagery is when Alex, Jonathan, Alex's grandfather, and Augustine are in Trachimbrod, and the river begins to swell with papers floating down the river—a scene that invokes both Trachim's death and Brod's dream of destruction albeit in a more peaceful, beautiful way. The papers also serve as a context for the story of Trachimbrod: "Memory can be recorded only through the interpretation of the indicators of memory—speech is sometimes juxtaposed with objects from the past" (Kramer 143).

Yet, these stylistic devices pose a risk of aestheticizing the Holocaust. The pairing of the imagery of the river with the history of what occurred lends a sense of unreality to the whole scene—beautiful but otherworldly. As a New York Times film review noted, "[the film] does not really illuminate much of anything about the destruction of Ukraine's Jews or survivor's guilt or the problems of historical memory, though these are its announced themes. Rather, the film chiefly dramatizes its own earnest desire to engage these topics, and to make something beautiful out of them…" (Scott para 6). Yet, it is not just the desire to make something beautiful that defines the changes made between the book and the film. The whole discussion of the perpetrator with the strong ties to the idea of the Banality of Evil is left out in the decision to change the character of Alex's grandfather into a Jewish victim of the Nazis:

> Any guilt Alexander—or Baruch (meaning: blessed), as his Jewish name is—might have incurred rest, in Schreiber's screenplay, rather with his having denied his Jewish identity and thus having 'betrayed' the victims of the Holocaust. He does not, as he does in

> the novel, point his finger to denounce his Jewish friend, if only to save the lives of his family, and his own. Thus the dimension of innocently becoming guilty and the whole intricate web of being perpetrator and victim at the same time, which is so central to the novel and, indeed, one of its most striking features, is largely ignored in Schreiber's film. (Kern-St□hler 176-7)

Repression, in the context of the film, has more to do with identity. It is paired, visually, with a landscape where the remnants of the Nazis still exist (abandoned and decaying tanks) but one where, at least in the urban setting, the memory of atrocity is linked more closely with the Soviets than the Germans.

In the film version of the text, grandfather becomes a Jew, one of the few survivors of the massacre at Trachimbrod.[7] The journey to take Jonathan to find Trachimbrod becomes for grandfather a coming to terms with his past as a victim—one who the Nazis thought they killed but who emerges from the mass grave of his townspeople. In leaving the pit, grandfather throws his coat with its yellow star back down, a sign that in this second life, he will no longer be a Jew. Thus, the fact of his Jewishness and his victimization during the Holocaust becomes the suppressed memory. By changing the history of the character, the film version no longer addresses the concept of the Banality of Evil, except for, perhaps, in its accusation towards the victims themselves. In returning to Trachimbrod, Alex's grandfather finally tells Alex his history, a move that allows him to connect emotionally with his grandson, as exemplified in the scene where Grandfather is driving from Trachimbrod and touches Alex's face lovingly—an

acknowledgement of the idea that suppressing history impacts all aspects of our relationships. In the film version as well, Alex's grandfather commits suicide as a result of the emergence of these memories. However, the meaning of that suicide is different. As Annette Kern-St□hler notes, "The film, in striking contrast, suggests that by killing himself, Alexander/Baruch finally takes his place among the victims and acknowledges his Jewishness thus to be reconciled with his past and the ghosts of that past (177-78). Both suicides in the book and film stem from survivor's guilt. However, the film version's does not ask the viewer to question the idea of responsibility and choiceless choice in the face of great evil.

Indeed, the film ends with themes of reconciliation rather than separation. By rediscovering the past and reclaiming their Jewish heritage, Alex's family is able to heal. The violence that so marks Alex's personal history is eclipsed by one of the ending scenes where Alex's whole family, wearing yarmulkes, are at Alex's grandfather's grave—a cohesive and supportive family unit. Jonathan's character, who appears "dead" throughout the film (best exemplified by the opening scene where a distance shot of Jonathan at his grandfather's gravestone makes him appear as if he is one of the gravestones) is alive because of the discovery of his past. In the voiceover that emerges in Jonathan's return, Alex states, "I have reflected many times upon our rigid search. It has shown me that everything is illuminated in the light of the past. It is always along the side of us, on the inside, looking out. Like you say, inside out. Jonathan, in this way, I will always be along the side of your life. And you will always be along the side of mine." In this moment, the story ends with the interconnections and healing

created through coming to terms with the past. The connections built through the compressions of the metafictional devices in the novel ask the reader for a complex identification with Alex's grandfather—one that is meant to elicit self-reflexive questioning on the part of the reader. The film does not ask the same of its viewer.

It is identification that becomes central to understanding the larger purposes of the novel. The two genres—book and film—have the power to mold a reader's reaction: "Both the novel and the film are fictions of 'witnessing' which, through the interpreter they introduce, and through the transmission of trauma he suffers, induce our identification with the victims and—although this is only in the novel—with the perpetrators and facilitate the further transmission of trauma" (Kern-St□hler 175). Since both forms allow for a kind of immersion into a story, they both allow for a more complex relationship to history: "Drama and film are a case in point because they perform roles and act out dilemmas. Like some installation art and museum exhibits, the viewer is placed *within* the space of the Holocaust and forced into an imaginative identification with the victims or survivors" (Sicher 68). While some may call Grandfather a victim in the novel (in being forced into this choiceless choice) and hence a survivor, there still remains the stigma of the choice he made—one that the character feels given his long-term repression of the memory and the fact of his suicide. In making the character in the film into the "Lista" type character—surviving from among the dead of the whole rest of the community, the viewer is denied that possibility of

identifying with the perpetrator. In that denial, we fail to connect to the idea that the Banality of Evil exists as a part of ourselves.

So, does this mean that there is a failure on the part of Schreiber in making these changes or does the act of changing a message to make it "palatable" something inherent in film? Even in the beginning of film (1915), the question of purpose emerges: "Yet this power of the moving pictures to supplement the schoolroom and the newspaper and the library is, after all, much less important than its chief task—to bring entertainment and enjoyment and happiness to the masses" (Münsterberg). As the artistry of film continues to grow, the relationship between real historical messages and entertainment becomes more complex, especially in relation to the Holocaust: "From the word go, it [the Holocaust] was not a subject that was particularly appealing to audiences. Maybe they didn't want to be reminded of their own anti-Semitism or racism. Maybe people don't go to movies to feel awful about themselves and what they are and what they do" (*Imaginary Witness*). Again, we can look to Tarantino's film, *Inglorious Basterds*, as an example of how complex the relationship is between viewer and movie. The film opens with a truthful depiction of the choiceless choice. Faced with the fact that Colonal Landa's men have his daughters outside (and the obvious fact that these men are armed), Monsieur LaPadite must ask himself whether he should risk their lives and his in order to protect the family of Jews hiding under his house—a bluff that may end in the deaths of both families rather than one. The scene is incredibly painful to watch, inviting the viewer into a sympathetic relationship with Monsieur LaPadite and, thus, the choiceless choice.

Yet, what makes that opening bearable? Immediately after that scene, the film embarks on a fantasy of revenge, culminating in the graphic death of Hitler at the hands of American Jews. While the viewer begins with painful emotion, there is a satisfying, cathartic release at the end, one that transforms the raw emotion of identification with a perpetrator into entertainment.

The film version of *Everything is Illuminated* also represents elements that make it a distinctly American response to the Holocaust. In the documentary, *Imaginary Witness: Hollywood and the Holocaust*, Michael Berenbaum discusses the ways in which place can affect the message of a film: "The place from which you remember an event shapes the nature of what you remember. In Poland, you tell the story of the Holocaust one way; in Berlin, you tell it another way. In America, the story of the Holocaust does not teach the differences between people but the notion that society must be broad enough and bold enough and wide enough to encompass all." In essence, it teaches an ideal of America that speaks to values of inclusivity and democracy. In the film, *Everything is Illuminated*, the scene towards the end of the film when Jonathan arrives back in the United States, exemplifies this idea. As he walks through the airport, he sees many of the Ukrainians he has met on his journey (many of whom openly displayed anti-Semitism) who are now airport workers, fellow travelers, or a boy with his parents. Visually, we read this as a moment of healing and forgiveness. Yet, does it also imply that if these people were American, they would not be anti-Semitic? Carrying that thought to its implied conclusion, the (American) viewer is left with the uplifting notion of "not in America."

In comparing the film and written versions of *Everything is Illuminated*, one is left with two very different messages. In the book, identification with the perpetrator allows for the possibility of self-reflexive questioning on the part of the reader. In addition, the book allows Foer to intricately explore the role of the intergenerational witness who writes into absence. The question of forgiveness is withheld through Foer's metafictional invocation of the author in the text; Alex does not exist in the real world for Foer. Thus, the character of Alex becomes a fantasy of what Foer perhaps hoped to find in the Ukraine. The film version evades all of these issues by removing the role of the perpetrator completely from the film. That change in character along with the decidedly American viewpoint at the end of the film, focuses more on healing rather than self-reflexively facing one's relationship to the Banality of Evil. In looking at this adaptation, one must ask why these changes were made. Does it reflect the viewpoint of the director? Or is this part of film as a medium of entertainment? In the next two chapters, I will continue to explore this question of whether film, as a genre, is capable (or willing) to enter into a discussion on the Banality of Evil.

Notes:

[1]The massacre at Babi Yar in September 1941 where over 30,000 Jews were shot and killed during a two day time span was carried out by SS soldiers and local Ukrainians. Yet, this is hardly the only episode of mass atrocity. As Menachem Feuer in "Almost Friends: Post-Holocaust Comedy, Tragedy, and Friendship in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*" notes, Ukraine's history during the war should be considered with a longer history of progroms that occurred before the war (as well as anti-Semitic incidents since that time).

[2]Here, I am not necessarily arguing that Jewish religious practice calls for this inscription of the Holocaust into religious faith. Rather, I am speaking to cultural traditions that deal with the passing down of history through oral storytelling.

[3]In the story, there are questions about who was in the wagon when it overturned since the only person who claims to have seen Trachim is unreliable. This sets up the instability of the Trachimbrod history that mirrors the Jonathan's position as he is writing it.

[4]Later in the Trachimbrod section, there is a developed scene of Safran reading *The Book of Antecendents* that specifically includes the section that Brod sees in this scene. However, the other details that Brod sees are not apparent in the scene with Safran, especially the young girl. While there is certainly a parallel structure between the two scenes, it is impossible to conclude that Brod is seeing Safran.

[5]In Alex's story, Jonathan finds remnants of Trachimbrod's history but those are stolen when he leaves the Ukraine, and thus, unavailable to him in his reconstruction of the history.

[6]Arendt's discussion of the Banality of Evil does address the role of the victim as a component in the Nazi's ability to carry out such widespread destruction through both the groups like the Judenrat who aided in the administration of the ghettos (including liquefying) and the overall lack of resistance. However, that continues to be a component of the discussion of the Banality of Evil that continues to cause unease.

[7]Possibly, he is the only Jewish survivor who was there when the Nazis arrived. The character of Augustine, who is really Lista in the novel, also undergoes a transformation from victim to bystander.

CHAPTER 6

TRANSITIONING FROM BOOK INTO FILM:

EXPLORING THE MEANING OF THE HOLOCAUST IN

THE PAWNBROKER

> Manifestly, we have not yet learned how to integrate the Holocaust into Jewish consciousness as we once integrated the exodus or the destruction of the Temples. The reason is clear. The Holocaust does not point anywhere but everywhere.
> -Jonathan Sacks, *The Holocaust in Jewish Theology*

> "Because while the truncheon may be used in lieu of conversation, words will always retain their power. Words offer the means to meaning, and for those who will listen, the enunciation of truth. And the truth is, there is something terribly wrong with this country, isn't there? Cruelty and injustice, intolerance and oppression. And where once you had the freedom to object, to think and speak as you saw fit, you now have censors and systems of surveillance coercing your conformity and soliciting your submission. How did this happen? Who's to blame? Well certainly there are those more responsible than others, and they will be held accountable, but again truth be told, if you're looking for the guilty, you need only look into a mirror."
>
> -V, *V for Vendetta*

In looking over the previous chapters leading to this one, there are two arcs that are being developed: one follows the use of self-reflexivity while another follows the developing commentary on Arendt's idea of the Banality of Evil, which is strongly tied to narratives that use themes that can best be described by Lawrence Langer's idea of deathlife narratives. *The Pawnbroker,* both Edward Lewis Wallant's novel and Sidney Lumet's film version, is the least self-reflexive

of the works explored; the role of the intergenerational witness is invoked through space as both the novel and the film build parallels between 1960's Harlem and Sol Nazerman's experiences of the Holocaust.[1] At the same time, *The Pawnbroker* also utilizes a version of the deathlife narrative that aligns most with Langer's conceptualization of the term in relation to Holocaust witness testimony in that both versions depict a survivor whose life is constantly shadowed by the unnatural deaths of others, including his family. Like the survivors Langer discusses, Nazerman's consciousness can be thrown into the past as something (a sound, a feeling, a sight) reminds him of the camps. There is a political motive for these flashbacks since it is meant to invoke the connections between Harlem and the Holocaust, specifically through an invocation of the Banality of Evil—one that Nazerman must come to terms with as he considers the role he plays in the corruption within Harlem. Thus, the community of memory that is invoked in both the novel and the film has ethical implications by asking the reader/viewer if there is a connection between the past and what is occurring in Harlem. Given the differences between the two forms, novel and film, it is striking how much Lumet was able to capture, especially the use of flashback, to invoke the connections between Nazerman's present and his past. At the same time, there are aspects of the film version, specifically character changes, that do affect the commentary on the Banality of Evil; while Lumet's changes are not as obvious as Liev Schreiber's cinematic version of *Everything is Illuminated*, the results are potentially similar in allowing the American viewer to disassociate oneself from the idea of the Banality of Evil as it could be applied to the race dynamics within

Harlem. This is not to say that Lumet's film fails completely in its aim; the viewer's ability to connect to the character of Nazerman in the film potentially invites self-reflection. At the same time, the film moves away from commentary that could challenge the viewer to consider how race constructions and power dynamics within the United States perpetuate exploitation and corruption.

To begin, it is important to understand Wallant's position as an intergenerational witness and the affect it has on both the development of his characters and the connections he builds between Harlem and the Holocaust. Compared with Art Spiegelman, Joseph Skibell, and Jonathan Safran Foer, Wallant's connection to the Holocaust seems to depend on what Avishai Margalit might characterize as a thinner relationship; whereas the former writers have direct family ties, Wallant's relies on being part of the Jewish community on the East Coast. The only possibility of a more direct link is based on information given by his editor: "According to Dan Wickenden, his editor at Harcourt, Brace, Wallant also had a close friend who had survived the death camps and may have related details relevant to scenes in *The Pawnbroker*" (Mesher para 6). Wallant's novel reflects this position since it focuses on the survivor in New York, haunted by memory rather than the self-reflexive positions related to family and personal memory that are at the core of Spiegelman's, Skibell's, and Foer's works. If *The Pawnbroker* can be seen as self-reflexive at all, it centers on place, New York, and seeks to build a connection between that space and the past:

> A direct rendition of the Holocaust throughout the novel would have placed the author on decidedly slippery ground because of the

> danger that he would fail to achieve the required authenticity, which is after all one of the necessary preconditions of Holocaust literature…Wallant realized that in order to achieve a certain degree of credibility it would be more appropriate to build the Holocaust story into a narrative using "props" that were more familiar to his own experience and to that of his American readers, i.e. to set the narrative in the America of his time. (Kolář 23)

As Stanislav Kolář goes on to note, this strategy is found in other American Holocaust novels and is useful for an American audience since it preserves distance from the event and allows for a familiar context. The Holocaust then appears through the medium of recollections (23). In this sense, the self-reflexivity relies on an American context.

Wallant's exposure to the Holocaust and witness testimony also influences the characterization of Nazerman in the text. Compared to the texts explored in the previous chapters, Nazerman most closely aligns with Spiegelman's father and the biographical sections of *Maus* although Nazerman can perhaps be read as a more stylized version in that he is represented as a kind of icon of suffering for the other characters: "The sight of the big white man lifted Cecil's spirits perceptibly; the awkward caution of his walk indicated misery on a different scale from his own. For a few minutes he forgot his wife…forgot even the anticipated misery of a whole day's work plastering walls with shaky, unwilling hands. He was actually moved to smile as Sol Nazerman approached, and he thought gaily, That man *suffer*!" (Wallant 4). The scale of Nazerman's suffering, even though it

is recognized by other characters in the novel, is represented on a different scale.[2] The few instances where this is not true are with the other Holocaust survivors in the text, which will be discusses more fully later in the chapter. Though the other characters might not know why Nazerman suffers, unless they see and understand the significance of the tattooed numbers on his arm, his misery is a clear sign in the text.

From the very first chapter, the reader is privy to the reasons for Nazerman's suffering since Wallant utilizes characteristics of the deathlife narrative revealed through the 3rd person narrator. Compared to the versions of intergenerational deathlife narratives that are seen in Skibell's and Foer's texts, Wallant's version follows more closely the witness testimony that Lawrence Langer uses in his conceptualization of the term: "In many instances the sensation of being dead while alive reflects a dual thrust of their present being: in chronological time they seek their future while in durational time, those isolated moments of dreadful memories do not dissipate but congeal into dense claws of tenacious consciousness. A lethal past relentlessly pursues them" (*Using and Abusing* 2). As Langer notes, the triggers for memory can be varied but, once the memory is evoked, it overwhelms the survivor, who suddenly finds oneself back in the past re-experiencing trauma. The witness, in these moments, has no power over the memory and cannot stop its emergence. This characteristic is present in Nazerman from the beginning of the text:

> Suddenly he had the sensation of being clubbed. An image was stamped *behind* his eyes like a bolt of pain. For an instant he

> moved blindly in the rosy morning, seeing a floodlit night filled with screaming. A groan escaped him, and he stretched his eyes wide. There was only the massed detail of a thousand buildings in quiet sunlight. In a minute he hardly remembered the hellish vision and sighed at just the recollection of a brief ache, his glass-covered eyes as bland and aloof as before. (Wallant 5).

Although the text is not clear about what sparks the memory at this point (Wallant will make specific connections later in the novel), the moment invokes the deathlife narrative and its connection to a duality of time: as Nazerman walks to work, he simultaneously finds himself thrust into the past through traumatic memory.

Nazerman's physical disfigurement also adds a layer to the development of the deathlife narrative in the novel. In the novel, Nazerman is a survivor of Nazi medical experimentation, an aspect that is hinted at from the beginning of the text as well: "No fear that *he* could be taken in by it; he had the battered memento of his body and his brain to protect him from illusion" (Wallant 4). The extent of the damage is not made apparent until the second chapter when Nazerman is bathing:

> It ran over the bulky, subtly deformed body, the body he never looked at, with its peculiar unevennesses, its inexplicable collapses and thickenings. There was a piece of his pelvic bone missing, two of his ribs were gone, and his collarbone slanted in weird misdirection. Seeing him, one might wonder what kind of bizarre

> accident had malformed him so shrewdly, with such perverse design. But, when he dried and covered himself with a robe, it became apparent that, by some coincidence (or queer design), each distortion had been compensated for by another, and nothing untoward showed in his clothed body except perhaps the careful awkwardness of his walk… (Wallant 37).

Of course, there is nothing accidental about what happened to Nazerman's body; it represents a kind of experimentation the purpose of which is grotesque rather than expanding legitimate medical knowledge, as the reader can see through the dream that recalls his experience: "'All done,' a doctor said. 'It will be interesting to see how he functions now'" (Wallant 131). In terms of his characterization, the deformation of his body (even if he does not look at it, he must feel it) serves as a constant, visceral reminder. Both body and mind are trapped within the deathlife—the constant reminder of the past and its continued presence.

The deathlife narrative in Wallant's novel is the underpinning to his alienation from the people that surround him—his sister's family in Mount Vernon, his customers, Tessie and her father (both survivors of the Holocaust), Jesus Ortiz, and Marilyn Birchfield, the social worker who tries to befriend him. Nazerman's alienation is conscious, cultivated to act as a shield. At points, he frames it mockingly like the moment where he quotes T.S. Eliot's *The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock*: "I grow old…I grow old…/I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled" (Wallant 55). The heart of Eliot's poem is the alienation of Prufrock from the world around him, seeing only fragments of people (women) as

he internally builds barriers that prevent him from participating in society and pursuing love. The lightness of the passage Nazerman recalls provides a sharp counterpoint for Nazerman's deeper alienation; Prufrock's inability to face social judgment seems superficial compared to Nazerman's experience of what humanity is capable of as seen through his experiences in the Holocaust. Immediately following the quote, Nazerman decides to visit Tessie Rubin, with whom Nazerman is having an affair. Both are survivors and both share the potential for a deep connection; Nazerman was a witness to Tessie's husband's brutal death in the camps. Yet, their relationship, even the physical act of sex, is without love: "And then they made love on the lumpy couch with the sounds of the old man's groaning madness in the other room, and there was very little of passion between them and nothing of real love or tenderness, but, rather, that immensely stronger force of desperation and mutual anguish" (Wallant 62). In his most intimate relationships, Nazerman is alienated, consumed by the past that prevents him from connecting on an emotional level with those who surround him.

The origins of his alienation are rooted in the Holocaust through the process of dehumanization he is forced into, the process of which is unfolded through the memories of the Holocaust that appear as dreams that Wallant visually distinguishes from the rest of the text by using italics. In his discussion of the dream passages, Kolář notes the progression of Nazerman's alienation as he relives his experiences in the war. The first dream focuses on the deportation of Nazerman and his family to the camps; crushed together in the cattle car,

Nazerman is unable to help his son, David, when he slips to the bottom of the car into the filth. As Nazerman's wife, Ruth, calls on him to help their son, he responds, "'But I can't, I can't. I can do nothing.' His voice sounded flat and unconcerned and he tried to put more passion into it. 'I am helpless, do you hear?'" (Wallant 38). The process of dehumanization has begun, leading to alienation as a way to deal with the extremities of his circumstances—ones that reinforce his powerlessness. Unable to act, he withdraws emotionally from his own family. The focus in the dreams then becomes Nazerman's role as a witness to Rubin's death, Ruth's sexual exploitation, and, finally, his work as a Sonderkommando: "It was a pair of spectacles, remarkably unbroken. He put them on, and the whole vast spectacle leapt into horrid clarity. He clenched his jaw as though to break the bone there and went back to his work, inflicting the cleared vision on himself. It was the very least he could do" (Wallant 198). Yet, this witnessing does not take place on an emotional level (and, indeed, in that extreme situation, it might not be possible). As Kolář notes, it is during Nazerman's work as a Sonderkommando that marks the final stage of his alienation: "When he comes across the dead body of Ruth, Sol feels estranged, perceiving the whole moment as a betrayal of their mutual love" (33). Kolář goes on to quote Wallant, "*How ugly, what a mockery of their love! Why did she do this to him?*" (224). Nazerman's focus is pushed so far into himself so that he no longer sees the larger context of why Ruth is dead; he blames her for the effect her death has on him, not the Nazi perpetrators. It is a narrowing of focus onto himself, onto what is immediate, that prevents him from seeing the larger power

structures that are the causes of his trauma—a result not uncommon in the camps when survival often might mean putting oneself above a fellow inmate.[3]

Although the alienation that Nazerman learns in the camps extends to the people he is surrounded by in America, he still becomes a figure on which members inscribe their various needs. While some of these may be more superficial than others, many of them call for a deeper emotional connection that Nazerman denies them. This is clear in the sections of the text where the narration focuses on Nazerman's family and the ways in which each member tries to visualize him in certain roles. Joan, for instance, tries to fit Nazerman into the portrait of what an American family should be: "she was even able to include her Uncle Sol in that rosy-tinted picture. She referred to Sol as being an old-fashioned bachelor, a very learned European ex-professor, and intimated to outsiders that his taciturnity was only a guise for a shyly affectionate nature" (Wallant 32). Certainly, Nazerman resists this reading of himself; when the family turns to conflict, he insists that he should be left alone. However, this does not prevent the other family members from seeing him in similar ways. Selig, Nazerman's brother-in-law, sees Nazerman as a sort of father figure: "You're younger than I am…but it's funny, this will sound foolish, I feel as protected with you here as I did when I was a kid still living with my father" (Wallant 82). Despite the distance that Nazerman places between himself and other people, their personal needs define how they perceive him, inscribing onto Nazerman identities that do not truly exist.

While the needs of his sister, Joan, and Selig are largely superficial (and have much more to do with his financial support), other characters in Wallant's novel have much deeper needs. For instance, Morton, the marginalized artist son of his sister, looks to Nazerman as the one who shows some value for his work—encouragement that does not exist in the rest of his family (166-67). For one of Nazerman's customers, George Smith, Nazerman serves as a bridge between the theory he reads and its application to real life. Among all the minor characters, George sees Nazerman as a way for him to ground himself in reality—specifically, to help him suppress his pedophiliac desire: "Thank the weekly visits to the Pawnbroker for the nourishing of his wistful discipline. Sol had appeared to him one day three years before, when he had been wandering in a maddened haze of lust, had answered him in that heady language he had formerly encountered only in books, had thus lent reality to words he had been losing contact with" (Wallant 48). Through the narration, Wallant establishes George's personal need for Nazerman. Despite Nazerman's dislike of associating with George, he still gives him something of himself: "Every few days [George] brought a token article for pawn, and Sol Nazerman had been unable to deny him that, had, in spite of a deep exasperation, played the strange, sad game with the frail Negro, as though it were some unwelcome yet necessary tribute he paid" (Wallant 48). Nazerman's alienation, however, makes the relationship fragile, as exemplified when he rejects George. Certainly, Nazerman is unaware of why George seeks him out. Conscious or not, the fact that there are (inferred) consequences to this rejection places a level of judgment on Nazerman.[4]

There are only two characters who are depicted as having an impact on Nazerman that begins to break down the boundaries between his memories of the camp and his present life in Harlem: Marilyn Birchfield and Jesus Ortiz. Their influence marks Nazerman's slow return to life—to the need to feel and to care for other people. Marilyn's determination to open Nazerman up is marked by both her persistence in pursuing him and by her recognition of his past. Of all the characters who are not Holocaust survivors, she is the only one who quickly recognizes the impact that the event had on Nazerman and chooses to confront it openly. When she sees the numbers tattooed onto his arm, she understands their significance; the other ghetto characters, including Ortiz, know that the numbers are significant but they do not know why. In contrast, Nazerman's family knows of his experience but chooses not to address it. Murillio, in his final confrontation with Nazerman, realizes the power—perhaps even the cause—of Nazerman's refusal to participate in victimizing others when he really looks at the tattoo and considers its implications. Yet, Marilyn is the only one who really tries to make a connection with Nazerman: "And then, just when he had her on the point of angrily humiliated departure, her eyes fell on the blue numbers on his arm. Her eyes went dreamy with pity, and she looked back up to his strange, ugly face with an exasperating humility, armored now beyond his insult. 'I am sorry, Mr. Nazerman'" (Wallant 103-04). While her consciousness of his past mediates her reactions to him, Marilyn still critiques his responses to others, his unwillingness to be truly alive: "tell me this, then, Mr. Nazerman. If your reasoning is correct, why haven't you found peace? Isn't it possible your

philosophy, or whatever you live by, is in error?" (Wallant 146-7). In the midst of Nazerman's declared desire for peace and quiet, he still talks with her; this is an indication of the ways in which his actions suggest an unspoken need for him to reach out to other people—and Marilyn is quick to recognize it.

The other major relationship that Nazerman participates in is with Jesus Ortiz, his assistant in the pawnshop. Nazerman's view of Ortiz focuses on how alive he seems to be: "And with that he was around the corner and on the steps leading up to the lost, moving with the amazing litheness that so startled Sol…Briefly, he tried to recall the distant sensation of youth" (Wallant 11). Throughout the text, there are brief moments when Nazerman seems to be making a connection with Ortiz:

> Outside, the early-evening traffic sounds crowded the last bits of silence into the store, where it surrounded them and left them like undiscovered islands in their private dusk. "But, most of all, I do not trust people and their talk, for they have created hell with that talk, for they have proved they do not deserve to exist for what they are." (Wallant 114-5)

The narration focuses on a connection between the two through its use of the term "them" combined with "surrounded" and "their private dusk." Sol is also expressing, in an oblique way, his experiences in the camps. The relationship between Nazerman and Ortiz is characterized by Alan Rosen as one of teacher and pupil: "At bottom, then, the lesson is about learning, about how to take what seems natural and, by examining its lineage, to see how history taught it to be what it is" (86). In this quote, Rosen is examining the lecture about the history of

Jews as "good businessmen." Yet, in explaining his experience, Nazerman is also teaching Ortiz about his history—albeit in a bitter way, utilizing stereotypes that are part of anti-Semitic views.[5] This marks the push and pull of Nazerman's relationship with Ortiz; even as Nazerman seems to be reaching out to Ortiz, he tries to close off their relationship: "'You are nothing to me,' Sol said savagely as the phantom of pain suddenly shot through him" (Wallant 180). Given that Nazerman's pain, both physical (from the medical experiments) and emotional, stems from his experience in the concentration camps, one reads this moment of rejection as connected to Nazerman's experience—a learned response that supports his alienation.

Nazerman's continued alienation, however, is not necessarily representative of all Holocaust survivors; while Tessie, Mendel, and Goberman certainly all bear trauma, they have not fully isolated themselves. Through the other Holocaust survivors in the text, the reader can contextualize Nazerman's responses to and alienation from his community since these characters serve as a sort of communal voice that echoes and contradicts Nazerman's choices as a survivor: "The survivor community acts as a Greek chorus whose comments and behavior provide a gauge by which to measure the protagonist" (Kremer 62). By refusing to isolate Nazerman's experience within the text, the reader is forced to consider other possible responses to the horrors of the Holocaust—especially ones that do not cut the survivor off from his/her emotions (i.e. Nazerman's response). As S. Lillian Kremer notes: "Since both Tessie and Sol are consumed with grief, one expressing it while the other suppresses it, their own relationship is void of

joy" (63). While it is not clear that Tessie's emotions are an adequate release for her trauma, she is not alienated. Her need for Nazerman, especially following the death of her father, is founded in shared experience. Yet, the fact that their emotions work in opposition to each other undermines the benefits each could share from this connection.

In looking at the survivor community as a chorus, it is perhaps Goberman who provides the closest mirror to Nazerman in terms of the larger message in the novel. As a survivor himself, Goberman also has access to memories of the horrors of the camps, but his response is different from that of Nazerman or Tessie in that his learned experience—survival at any cost—underlies his exploitation of other survivors as seen through his treatment of Tessie. Supposedly working as a fundraiser to aid Jews worldwide, the texts infers that he is secretly taking the money.[6] To further his cause, he preys on the survival guilt of the others: "…in a grotesque parody of justice, Goberman confuses Holocaust survivors with their oppressors, demanding that the victims expiate their sin of outliving fellow Holocaust victims by helping Jews in current peril" (Kramer 63). At the same time, it may not be confusion that underlies Goberman's actions; rather, he exploits anyone he can to ensure his own wellbeing. When Nazerman meets Goberman, he recognizes Goberman from Bergen-Belsen:

> "Yes, yes, I'm certain now. You were even a little fatter then. You had a method for getting more food. There was some talk—I don't know for sure how true—but there was some talk of *co-operation* with a certain…"

> "It was a lie, a complete lie!" Goberman shouted, beating on his briefcase. "No one could accuse…"
>
> "If I am not mistaken there was someone who claimed that you even informed on members of your own family…" (Wallant 123).

While many survivors felt some guilt for the choiceless choices they made (Nazerman working as a Sonderkommando, a worker in the process of death, faces guilt for his role in enabling the camps to function), Goberman's actions, if true, marks a more extreme violation by betraying his family. That some measure of Nazerman's accusation is true comes out in Goberman's response: "No one can say to my face that I…*never* in a million years would I have done a thing like that to my *immediate* family. Do you think I could sleep at night, do you think I could sit still for a minute if…? Would I run around like a madman, day and night, if I…?" (Wallant 124). The stress on "immediate" family indicates a partial, not complete rejection of Nazerman's accusation. Pairing that stress with the fractured questions, the second contradicting the first, reveals a level of guilt beyond that of most survivors. While "many witnesses evince a questioning, retrospective 'why me' guilt, most often thought of as *survivor guilt*," Goberman's active exploitation of Jews during the Holocaust by acting as an informant goes beyond the choiceless choice seen in the novel *Everything is Illuminated* (Kraft 138).[7] The motivation of his actions is banal—it is a basic human instinct to want to survive—but by betraying his ethical (thick) relationships, Goberman's actions would be seen as less forgivable.

It is precisely that guilt that Nazerman uses against Goberman to free Tessie from being exploited through her survivor guilt; yet, Nazerman simultaneously claims not to judge him: "But you feel guilt about some of your crimes, you cannot sleep so well. So you run around with that brief case and try to make everyone feel as guilty as you, meantime turning a pretty penny. Now I do not judge you, understand, it does not matter to me what you do. Only you must know that you are naked to me" (Wallant 124). On one level, this speaks to Nazerman's alienation—he does not care enough to judge; on another level, the inability to judge is a comment on Nazerman's own actions in the present. While there is discussion throughout the novel about how the pawning industry preys economically on the poor, Nazerman's shop also serves as a money laundering center for Murillio's illegal activities. Goberman is indeed naked to Nazerman in that Nazerman can relate to Goberman's actions in New York. At the same time, Nazerman is not yet self-reflexively aware of the ways in which he has dehumanized the people around him—an act that allows him to participate in the evil going on in New York. Although Mintz's commentary is aimed at the film version of *The Pawnbroker*, it applies to the novel as well:

> Detachment is understood in *The Pawnbroker* as a process in which, because of unspeakable suffering, a person severs connections to others, becomes insensible to their pain, and thereby withdraws from the interconnectedness of humanity. Within the ethos of social conscience, detachment is the ultimate sin; it is the antithesis of sensitivity and makes engagement and

> commitment impossible…His moral disfigurement is extreme because his victimization has been extreme. (113-14).

As Mintz notes here (and as discussed earlier in the chapter), Nazerman's sense of alienation is grounded in his experiences during the Holocaust. That fact, however, does not eclipse the critique that is at the heart of the novel—that Nazerman's actions in the present make him a part of a system of violence and exploitation. This invites one to revisit Margalit's quote, "There is not so much of the banality of evil as the banality of indifference. Yet, one has to admit that the combination of evil and indifference is lethal, like the combination of poison and water" (34). While Wallant's novel predates Hannah Arendt's *Eichman in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, he does question how such widespread evil was (and is) possible through alienation and indifference.

A fair amount of the critique on Wallant's text (and the film version) centers on the perceived mode through which Nazerman overcomes his indifference, namely the death of his assistant Jesus Ortiz. As Kolář notes, "Jesus' sacrificial death, by means of which Wallant highlights a series of biblical parallels (e.g. with the symbolic name of the character of the assistant or the crucifixion scenes in the novel), consummates the pawnbroker's emotional transformation. It liberates him from emotional deficiency and inertia" (36). The fact that the novel (and the film) applies Christian redemptive themes to a Holocaust survivor is problematic, as critics like Alan Mintz note. Yet, it is important to recognize that the rising action of the novel centers on Nazerman's self-reflexive realization of the consequences of his actions—that he is part of the

oppressive forces at play in Harlem. This realization begins to occur when Nazerman focuses on the presence of the brothel and its connection to Murillio and, through him, to Nazerman and his pawn shop. In Nazerman's realization of his role in the exploitation of young women, he makes the association with his wife's rape and forced prostitution in the camps; part of his trauma is that he is made to witness his wife in the camp's brothel (and that she sees him witnessing it). Once he becomes aware of the brothel, he begins the process of change.

The dream that contains Nazerman's witnessing of his wife's sexual exploitation does not occur until after his confrontation with Murillio during which he attempts to sever their relationship. At first, Nazerman recognizes his unease and decides to act, without forcing himself to recognize the causes of his emotion. The full emotional response that triggers the dream is not invoked until after he is emasculated by having a gun shoved into his mouth: "And Sol stood there gagging on the horrible curb in his mouth, his gaze swinging wildly over the trappings of the hideously sumptuous room…It had been so long, so long since his nightmares were as real as taste and touch, since they came to him in waking hours. He should have remembered more faithfully that this was the real taste of life, that it was not confined to dreams" (Wallant 163-4). The depravity that was so often displayed in the camps is not isolated to the Holocaust—brutality can exist elsewhere. Yet, the connection between Nazerman's present and his dreams of the camps does not mean that Harlem and the Holocaust are interchangeable: "Although Wallant juxtaposes Harlem ghetto and European concentration camp, he judiciously distinguishes between the attendant human debasement of the

American ghetto and government sponsored genocide in the German concentration camps" (Kremer 66). Rather, the point being made is that evil and the banality, the indifference that allows it to perpetuate exists on multiple levels—and that even a Holocaust survivor can become part of a system of exploitation.

It is Nazerman's realization of his own implication in the violence and exploitation in Harlem that is the driving force of his transformation. This is clearly indicated in his dream about his daughter Naomi, whose body he finds in the camp hanging from a hook. During the dream, he begins to see the faces from New York superimposed upon the body of his daughter: "Each face appeared on the frail baby body with the cruel hook pointing up toward the head. They were like slides projected there. Yet in spite of the unreality, the succession of faces brought him no relief, indeed, made his pain grow worse, become cumulative, and each moment he thought to be the ultimate agony was exposed by the next moment's increased intensity" (Wallant 194). This moment of grief, containing screams that are characterized as like "vomiting or giving birth," reflects Nazerman's transformation, his step back from alienation and indifference (Wallant 193). It is also the foundation for his choice to die rather than to continue as part of Murillio's criminal syndicate. While Murillio chooses to allow Nazerman to live, Nazerman must still face the consequences of his choices. Motivated by greed and anger at Nazerman's rejection of him, Ortiz chooses to participate in the robbery of the pawn shop; when one of the gun men, Robinson, decides to shoot Nazerman, Ortiz intercedes and dies. Like Nazerman,

Ortiz must make a choice and he chooses to take responsibility for his actions. Because of that choice, Nazerman must take responsibility for living. While the ending certainly does invite a reading of Christian redemption, condensing Nazerman's transformation to that moment undermines Wallant's theme on indifference and evil. It is that theme that invites the reader to consider how racial tensions and ongoing inequality might also be characterized in terms of the Banality of Evil.

Sidney Lumet's adaptation of *The Pawnbroker*

The narrative choices in Wallant's text serve to focus the meaning of the novel around Nazerman; even when the narrative moves from Nazerman's experience, he is still present. As critic Lillian S. Kremer notes: "Wallant successfully moved the Holocaust from the shadowy realm of symbolism and allusion to the foreground of fiction, presenting it as a major component of theme, narrative, and character construct" (59). Certainly, a similar argument has been made for Sidney Lumet's film adaptation of the novel. By using editing and cross-cutting, Lumet also establishes the focus on Nazerman's subjective experience; thus creating a metalanguage of visual images in a montage to express the consciousness of a Holocaust witness.[8] At the same time, it is important to analyze this metalanguage in terms of the subtexts that are created. While the film manages to capture Nazerman's self-reflexive recognition of his role in the ongoing crime and violence in Harlem, the larger message of the novel—the one that asks the reader to consider if there are aspects of American life that might be

characterized in terms of the Banality of Evil (and, potentially, the American reader's own participation in that system)—is impacted by key changes made in the film.

The importance of film, a media that reaches larger audiences then most novels, as a way to represent the Holocaust is widely felt, especially in terms of the importance placed on remembering. At the same time, films have often been critiqued for their failure to fully grasp the nature of the Holocaust; behind this critique, there is a widespread concern for *how* films represent this event to a consumer market. In *Between Witness and Testimony*, authors Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer note the ways that these issues affect the value of film representations. They begin by discussing the ways that film functions as testimony: "But if we see testimony as an attempt to render in language that which we know—if we see testimony as a narrative account of the occurrence of events, events we have experienced by bringing them to knowledge ourselves—then …films all function as testimony" (Bernard-Donals 104). These events, especially in relation to an event as horrific as the Holocaust—one that defies words to hold it—break down when film (and other forms) attempt to express it in a universal language: "while you can arrive at knowledge—a universal position that can be understood by every speaking subject—something is lost from it: the encounter with the object is itself not recognizable in knowledge. The trauma of the event is covered over by the language that endeavors to speak it" (Bernard-Donals 105). Yet, the issue is not just in the language but also in the genre, as Annette Insdorf notes in the documentary, *Imaginary Witness: Hollywood and the*

Holocaust: "Of all art forms, film is the one that gives the greatest illusion of authenticity, of truth. A motion picture takes a viewer inside where real people are supposed to be doing real things. We assume there is a certain verisimilitude, a certain authenticity but there is always some degree of manipulation, some degree of distortion." In the act of trying to put this event into film, there is a breakdown in possibilities of understanding due to the lack of a common experience that makes it intelligible to everyone; the availability of the knowledge is not there for everyone and the referents that one may bring to fore to try to make this event understandable potentially strips it of its magnitude. In addition, the genre itself potentially distorts since it cannot be an exact replication of the event.

So, how does one represent the Holocaust? Insdorf, in *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust*, posits the importance of subjectivity of view—the focus on one character's understanding and relation to the Holocaust—as more "truthful" then a fictional reconstruction of the camps themselves (23). Since this subjectivity focuses on the individual, it resists attempts to universalize its message. From the very beginning of the film, Lumet tries to emphasize the fact that the metalanguage of the film—the flashbacks—are representative of Nazerman's subjectivity. The film opens with a dream sequence in which Nazerman remembers a picnic with his family. The scene is pastoral: a medium-long shot of children running through the long grass transitioning to a medium close-up of a beautiful dark-haired woman that pans away into a long shot of the field. The scene continues, moving from medium-long shots to medium close-ups

as each person (father, mother, Nazerman, wife, children) are considered. The children run to Nazerman and he picks them up; the music changes from a discordant melody to a tone of danger. Then one hears the name, "Sol," and the scene dissolves into a "present day" suburb until the camera finally picks out Nazerman waking up at the house he shares with his wife's sister's family. The representation of the family changes since the film relies on visual representation and not voice over to work as the commentary/summary/interiority does in the novel. And, since viewing time is less than syuzhet (which is less than the fabula) the screenplay (written by Morton Fine and David Friedkin) focuses the dialogue on the most obvious relationship between the Nazerman and the family: money. The only exception is when Bertha reminisces about her sister, Ruth, and notes that it is almost 25 years since her death. As Bertha is speaking, the camera moves from a one shot of her to a one shot of Nazerman. When the one shot of Nazerman appears, the viewer sees a quick blip—a flash frame—of the woman from the dream. By framing this initial flash frame within a one shot of Nazerman, the camera is constructing the memory in such a way that the viewer interprets the memory as Nazerman's since his face is the only referent for the flash frame.

The scene then dissolves into one of Nazerman driving in Harlem. In this scene, Lumet uses a different camera angle to establish Nazerman's perspective. When Nazerman leaves the car, the camera angle moves diagonally up as if the camera was getting out of the car. This movement, which is visually awkward, reflects the movement of Nazerman getting out of the car; the viewer is meant to

think that they are viewing the scene from Nazerman's perspective. The view then moves through Harlem, picking up people here and there, a shop window full of a pile of shoes (reflecting the well-known piles of clothing, shoes, etc. that were found at the camps), and again more people—all of whom are wearing worn clothes. Throughout this movement through Harlem, the shot shifts back to a medium close-up of Nazerman; his face is the constant referent of his perspective. The indication that the narrative has moved out of Nazerman's viewpoint is a high crane shot that shows him crossing the street to the pawnshop.

Since the demands of the viewing time necessitate a compression of characters, the film really only focuses on two characters: Nazerman and (to a much lesser extent) Jesus. Yet, Lumet still tries to depict Nazerman's relationship to the community. In the pawn shop, Nazerman quickly enters his cage—the visual metaphor for his emotional entrapment. When he is participating with the community, the camera picks them up as two shots, generally moving back and forth between the characters in over the shoulder angles. When he is trying to establish distance between himself and the character he is facing, the camera still moves back and forth but each character is framed in a one shot. The strongest example of the effectiveness of this camera movement is when George comes in to talk to Nazerman but he has nothing to pawn. The character of George is changed in the movie; while he still reads complex books of theory, his voice is thick—almost as if he had a stroke. To understand his words, the viewer has to pay attention. This reflects the demands that George makes on Nazerman's time but in a wholly different way; patience is now required for a physical impairment

and not a psychological one that the medium of film would have a great deal of difficulty in representing, specifically in terms of time constraints. Nazerman's responses are a limited to his business, which is also a deviation from the novel. When George comes to talk to Nazerman (without having anything to pawn), Nazerman cuts short his dialogue by asking what George has brought in. The scene is visually constructed in a series of one shots; as George explains that he has nothing, the camera stays on him for an uncomfortably long shot. The viewer is forced to see George's pain. The camera then cross cuts to Nazerman's unresponsive face for a brief shot and then returns to another long one shot of George's face attempting to control his emotions as he backs away and finally leaves. By keeping the camera focused on George for such an uncomfortable length, the camera forces the viewer to participate in his discomfort. By constructing the space of the pawn shop through these series of two shots/one shots, Lumet is visually attempting to express Nazerman's alienation from the community.

It is also during this day at the pawnshop that Marilyn Birchfield first appears. Throughout the film, the figure of Marilyn is constantly framed by doors, a visual metaphor for a passageway. Given that Marilyn's character represents connection to the community, the use of the doors indicates the potential for Nazerman to reject his alienation and indifference. In this first scene, the door behind her is closed, a reflection of Nazerman's complete refusal to connect to her. The shots of Nazerman are one shots behind his cage, a visual representation of the bars between them. During their conversation, the door

behind Marilyn opens and a group of musicians come in to redeem their instruments. The musicians also play a little, a reflection of the music that is used when the filmic narrative moves into Harlem (the pawnshop is quiet). This framing indicates her participation in the community; Nazerman remains inside his cage until he is finally drawn out far enough to be framed by the open transaction window of the cage. Throughout the scene, Nazerman tries to resist coming closer to her until he finally agrees to give her money. When she leaves in anger at his comments, she leaves with the musicians; the larger connection to the community is severed with her exit.

The framing of Marilyn with doorways is a key visual image when Nazerman comes to talk with her after his confrontation with Rodriguez (Murillio in the novel). Inside the apartment, the camera captures Nazerman sitting on a chair and Marilyn standing, trying to get him to talk. In these two shots, there is an open door between them. Marilyn convinces Nazerman to go outside with her—a passage into a moment where he tries to share part of himself with her. He briefly looks at the city: tenements, industry, and a train yard meet his eyes. Nazerman wearily moves to sit; in the one shots of him sitting, he is framed by the shadows of the metal framework of the balcony—a visual rhetoric of entrapment. The conversation between the two moves from one shots (medium close-ups) of each. Unlike in the novel, Nazerman chooses to tell her that it is the anniversary of his family's massacre. When he says, "I didn't die," the mise-en-scène (the background framing the characters) changes as the one shot shifts to his profile; behind him in the middle distance is an abandoned train car and the

horizon is marked by the smokestacks of an industrial plant. Clearly, these are visual reminders of both the ways Holocaust victims were transported and of the crematorium of the concentration camps. The framing of the shop also places the smokestacks in between Nazerman and Marilyn, a reinforcing image of the experience that separates the two characters. Nazerman's ongoing alienation continues through the end of the scene as the characters remain visually separated. After telling her, Nazerman stands up and walks past her, a passage back from the small bit of connection that he has allowed himself. The shot moves back to the interior with Marilyn sitting holding herself and Nazerman coming in and sitting behind her. The two shot again shows the distance between them, separated again by the open door. Yet, there is also a small plant (an indication of new life) between them. But the sharing is not enough, when Marilyn reaches back to touch him, Nazerman doesn't respond.

While the mise-en-scène and the shifts between one shots and two shots show one aspect of Nazerman's relationship to the community, Lumet also uses cross-cutting (shifts from one scene to another) to emphasize differences between Nazerman's relationship with Tessie and Ortiz's with Mabel. This is especially evident in the cross-cutting between the two couples having sex. Nazerman and Tessie are shown as not moving; she is lying underneath him, her head turned to the camera while his is turned away. They don't move. The scene then cuts to one of Mabel and Ortiz, she is one top of him and they are looking into each other's eyes. After a few moments, they begin to laugh. The scene then cuts back to Nazerman and Tessie. The cross-cutting narrates the differences between the

Holocaust survivors' relationship (without passion or love) and the young Harlem couple (who are full of passion). In this way, the editing of the two scenes in juxtaposition emphasizes the lack of emotion that prevails in Nazerman's relationship with Tessie.

The most notable use of film editing throughout this film is the flash cuts; while it sets up Nazerman's subjectivity, it also creates a feeling of discomfort for the viewer who barely has time to see what the flash frame contains until it develops into a sustained scene. In *Imaginary Witness,* Sidney Lumet discusses the origin of his use of the flash cuts: "I simply went back to the simplest thing, which is how my own memory works if I am trying to avoid something. It was a quite literal interpretation of what happens in my own head, which is if I am fighting it, it flashes and flashes until finally it smashes through of its own volition." In the scene where Nazerman is leaving the pawnshop, a dog begins barking and the film flashes from Nazerman to an image of a dog running. Nazerman continues walking, to his right behind a fence a gang of young men are beating up one young black man. The man tries to escape and runs to the fence, the scene flashes to that of a man trying to escape the German Shepard by climbing a fence. This series of flash frames between present day Harlem and concentration camp also flicker between a shot of Nazerman (with bald head and striped uniform) watching the man on the fence to present-day Nazerman watching the young black man trying to escape. The violence of the present echoes the past just as Nazerman's position as witness in both periods is emphasized. A procedural schemata is established since the similarity of the

pairings of images represent a connection between time and space (as well as establishing a causal link for the past to emerge).

A similar link is established in the scene where Nazerman is on the train. After Nazerman sits down, he begins looking at his fellow passengers. The camera shifts to a medium close-up/one shot of a man with hollowed cheeks—an emaciated face. The camera shifts back to Nazerman and tracks him as he moves to the center of the car. From that central position, the camera again picks out another emaciated face. The frame flashes to scenes in a packed train car. Nazerman's center of subjectivity remains since the camera frames each shot from his position in the center of the car. As the camera moves in a 360 degree turn, the frames flash from the contemporary train to the packed train car of Nazerman's memory. When the turn is complete, the camera tracks Nazerman's attempt to flee from the car. As he opens another train car door, the train screams and the picture of Nazerman flashes into a sustained vision of the past with a baby crying. Nazerman again relives his inability to keep his son David from falling, crying out again and again, "I can do nothing!" This scene cuts away to the present as Nazerman stumbles off the train, disheveled, his mouth opening in a soundless cry. On one level, the use of the flash cuts visually connects the present to the past; on another level, it invokes the death-life narrative—the sense that a trigger can propel one back in time even as one is living in the present. The fact that these flash cuts overwhelm the screen, blotting out the present altogether for a brief space of time, reinforces the intensity of Nazerman's trauma.

The use of the flash frames to enact Nazerman's painful memories creates a powerful image, creating a dialogue between Nazerman's experiences in New York and his memories in the camps. As in the novel, the memories emerge based on a trigger. When Mabel offers herself to Nazerman as a prostitute, she bares her breasts and demands that he look at her. Moving from flash frames of Nazerman's naked wife, the viewer becomes immersed in a scene where Nazerman is watching a group of women being forced into a building while laughing, black-uniformed Nazi officers enter from the other side. The officer in charge of Nazerman grabs him and forces him to the window of the building. When he refuses to look in, the guard smashes his head through the window. From his position, the camera scans from an image of a woman being scrubbed by two Nazi officers to other cubicles and finally to his naked wife. All the while, the viewer hears Mabel's voice saying, "It don't cost you nothing to look…look…look." The inclusion of her voice breaks down the boundaries between the present and the past joining both women's sexual exploitation. This does not mean that each women's victimization is represented as the same; Ruth's forced prostitution is different than Mabel's choice based on economic subjugation. Rather, the bleeding of the memory of his wife's rape into the present is a condensed version of Nazerman's motivations for deciding to end his relationship with Rodriguez.

Yet, does this do justice to the distance between the Holocaust and Harlem that Wallant places in his narrative? While it is clear that Lumet does not have the time to use separate dream sequences, the compression of the past and the

present through the flash frames seems to indicate that the violence in the present is similar to what Nazerman experiences in the past. This connection is further emphasized in the scene where Nazerman confronts Rodriguez. The choice to change the character of the Italian-American Murillio to the black Rodriguez is problematic. As Alan Rosen notes, "In the novel, then, the chain of exploitation, from syndicate chief to the pawnbroker to the mainly black population of Harlem, replicates that of European Colonialism. For Lumet, however, the agent of oppression comes not from without but from within...from one, in other words, who himself comes out of Harlem" (90). It is in these choices, which change the broader political thrust of the novel, that one begins to question the ideological subtext of the film. While it is somewhat misleading to say that these choices are auteur-like, the existence of a clear set of choices that changes the subtext of the film seems to indicate a controlling figure. As Peter Wollen notes, one branch of auteur critics "grew up," "those who insisted on revealing a core of meanings, of thematic motifs." The main focus of auteur theory centered on issues of style, including film editing such as has been discussed in this chapter. Yet, the addition of ideological purpose is problematic in considering this theory; there are semantic approaches that would seem to fit better if one were to look at film as language. In that way, one could access the ideological in terms of the encodement of language based on a suture model (Silverman). Yet, these critiques focus on what is absent and, following a Lacanian linguistic model, seem to say that these meanings are as much inherited as they are pre-existing in language. In moving from a novel to a film, the choice made to change a

character indicates an authority that is actively choosing the conditions of representation. In this way, auteur critics allow one a way to directly address the fact that film, as a structured medium, represents choices that in turn affect how the movie is read.

Returning to the example of Rodriguez, Lumet structures the confrontation between Nazerman and Rodriguez in the same way that he constructs the subjective memory of Nazerman. In the face of Rodriguez's anger, Nazerman assumes the role of victim; Rodriguez has the power not only to physically force Nazerman to look at him, but to force him to see his own participation in the victimizing of others. The narrative of the film emphasizes Nazerman's transition from blindness to sight; his glasses shift from opaque with the light bouncing off them to translucent where one can see Nazerman's eyes. When Rodriguez moves back to his side of the room, he tells Nazerman to sign the papers. The camera focuses on Nazerman's face and as he repeats the word yes, the shortest of the flash frames begin. These flashes do not, however, focus on the past; they focus on Rodriguez. Since the viewer is already conditioned to see these flashes as representative of Nazi atrocity, one draws a parallel between Rodriguez and the Nazis in terms of the potential for violence that exists within humanity (not in terms of the scale of atrocity). At the same time, the change of the character potentially changes how the audience connects to the social issues in New York: as Alan Rosen notes, the change of race of the syndicate boss emphasizes the ways in which the victim is responsible for his/her own persecution—a parallel between Harlem and Hannah Arendt's criticism in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* that

the Jews were responsible for their own victimization (90). By presenting the viewers with the idea that victims are ultimately responsible for their suffering—an idea that totally fails to consider the power structures that created each of these spaces—the viewer is potentially released from the larger political message concerning power structures and race relations in America.

The pairing of Rodriguez with the Nazi is also problematized through another subtext in the film. In earlier scenes, the viewer connects Rodriguez with a young white (Aryan looking) man who in some ways serves him (dialing the telephone) although he also seems to be on terms of some equality (he sits at the same table as Rodriguez). This is an entirely new character with minimal action in the film—meant for a visual effect that could potentially recall the power dynamics of the book except for his subservience to Rodriguez. When the young man enters at the end of Nazerman's confrontation with Rodriguez, Rodriguez cuts the conversation short and follows the young man upstairs. The inference of a homosexual relationship between the two might be ignored if not for other connections made between the homoerotic and the criminal throughout the film. Early in the film during the club scene, Tangee, Buck, and Robinson begin formulating a plan to rob the pawnshop (and trying to seduce Ortiz into joining them); on stage as background to their interaction is what appears to be a woman onstage, dancing with her skirt held up to just below her crotch. At the end of the scene, it is revealed that the performer is actually male. This is also combined with a scene (just before the robbing of the pawnshop) consisting of a one shot

where Robinson is laying on his bed with an open magazine depicting two bare-chested men. With his gun, Robinson touches the nipples of the men, tooting on his harmonica for emphasis.

This subtext that links homosexuality to the evil in Harlem is problematic for two reasons: one, it associates homosexuality with crime and violence (in the context of the 1960's, homosexuality is still widely considered a mental illness), and two, the character of Rodriguez invokes stereotypes about black male sexuality. As Angela Davis notes in *Rape, Racism, and the Myth of the Black Rapist*, "For once the notion is accepted that Black men harbor irresistible and animal-like sexual urges, the entire race is invested with bestiality" (54). In *The Pawnbroker*, the target of sexual control shifts from white women to a young white man, potentially invoking homophobia. The use of homosexuality also combines with the images of the sexual exploitation of women in the film (including the one from the concentration camp), linking socially deviant sexuality with evil. If one of the larger goals of the novel is to ask how the indifference combines with evil in the racial politics of America, the subtexts created in the movie through its commentary on sexuality combined with the idea that the evil happening is a result of blacks taking advantage of other blacks obscure that message. In that way, an American audience of the film is released from self-reflexively considering how their own actions might be contributing to the institutionalization of racism in the United States.

While the audience may not be forced to consider the larger political commentary on the Banality of Evil as it may apply to America, the film does

exact a consideration of indifference on a personal level through the audience's connection to Sol Nazerman, as portrayed by Rod Steiger. Despite the fact that Nazerman (as he is in the novel) is a cold character, one feels a great deal of sympathy for his character, especially as one sees what he experienced during the Holocaust. That connection allows for a personal exploration of the theme of the Banality of Evil, a consideration of personal actions on a localized scale. At the end of the film, when Nazerman goes to the dying Ortiz, the viewer sees a flood of emotion. In *Imaginary Witness*, Steiger discussed the choices he made as an actor in that moment: "I had one of the best moments I have had in acting. I was involved, I was upset, I was crying. And then my intellect came in and I was supposed to scream 'Don't make a sound.' I put my head back and I did a silent scream, which was twice as powerful than if I would of screamed because you put your scream in my mouth." By denying the audience catharsis—a release of the audience's emotion through the actor—the viewer is forced into a personal connection with the moment. The commentary on the theme of the Banality of Evil is not lost in the film but it remains compressed, distanced from a larger political commentary on race relations.

By looking at the choices that Lumet makes in adapting Wallant's book into film, one can see how Lumet both succeeded and failed in portraying the narrative purpose of Wallant's text. The film, with it metalanguage, does an excellent job of portraying one individual's experience of the Holocaust—the subjective view. On a personal, compressed scale, the viewer is forced into a consideration of indifference and violence/exploitation—to the theme of the

Banality of Evil. At the same time, the changes in characterization release the audience from the larger socio-political commentary that comes from the book's representation of Harlem as a microcosm for racial politics in the United States. This stands in stark contrast to the passage from *V for Vendetta* quoted at the beginning of this chapter. When the character of V says, "if you're looking for the guilty, you need only look into a mirror," he is speaking to the whole of England, which in the film is under a Nazi-esque dictatorship.[9] How can that film, which is so obviously an action packed fantasy, make a clearer statement about the Banality of Evil than films like *The Pawnbroker* or *Everything is Illuminated*? The answer lies in *V for Vendetta*'s overt fictionality—the audience has a release from the first moments of the film in that nothing presented is real. In addition, films like *The Pawnbroker* and *Everything is Illuminated* address the Banality of Evil in more complex ways. In critiquing these films for failing to force the viewer into a consideration of the Banality of Evil in a personal way, we must ask whether the problem is one of genre or one of audience.

Notes:

[1]As Leonard J. Jeff notes in his discussion of how the film *The Pawnbroker* was developed into a movie, it would be a mistake to see the film as the work of an auteur since there were many different people involved in the development of the screenplay long before Sidney Lumet became involved with the project. For the purposes of this analysis, however, it is important to look at the film's message holistically and I will be using Lumet's position as director to talk about the film in terms of the final product.

[2]This passage could be read as potentially invoking a comparison of suffering between Jews and African Americans if both Nazerman and Cecil are read as representatives of each larger group. However, each character's point of suffering is so individualized and, given Nazerman's experiences in the camp, there is really no point of comparison. At the same time, I do not think each character's relative position undermines the parallels between Harlem and the Holocaust that Wallant is trying to discuss. For a fuller discussion of the debates on comparisons of suffering between African Americans and Holocaust scholars, please see chapter 6.

[3]In *Night*, Eli Wiesel painfully discusses the ways in which the struggle for survival affects even the closest relationships like that of Rabbi Eliahou's son, who abandons his father and Wiesel's own view of his father as a hindrance on his survival. In the camps where survival is so tenuous, the focus can turn inwards. There is also another form of emotional distance that happens when these relationships also become sites of trauma (the guilt for doing nothing and seeing a loved one die—even when one has no ability to help).

[4]Although the reader is never shown what George does, on p. 243, he is shown waiting "spitefully predatory" for a victim on George's "own road to hell."

[5]In *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Memory*, Alan Mintz discusses both his and Ilan Avisar's discomfort with the way these stereotypes are used in the film version.

[6]Nazerman believes this is what Goberman is doing, even before he meets him.

[7]See the discussion of Alexander's Grandfather in Chapter 4.

[8]The ensuing analysis of film through editing relies on Bordwell's theory of filmic narrative as he delineates it in his text, *Narration in the Fiction Film*.

[9]V does this through a television broadcast on the government's emergency broadcast channel.

CHAPTER 7

INTERGENERATIONAL WITNESSING:

COMPARING AFRICAN AMERICAN AND JEWISH AMERICAN

RESPONSES TO TRAUMA

> Finally she speaks and her voice is soft but stern. "I don't know", she says. "I don't know whether the bird you are holding is dead or alive, but what I do know is that it is in your hands. It is in your hands."
>
> Her answer can be taken to mean: if it is dead, you have either found it that way or you have killed it. If it is alive, you can still kill it. Whether it is to stay alive, it is your decision. Whatever the case, it is your responsibility.…
>
> Speculation on what (other than its own frail body) that bird-in-the-hand might signify has always been attractive to me, but especially so now thinking, as I have been, about the work I do that has brought me to this company. So I choose to read the bird as language and the woman as a practiced writer. She is worried about how the language she dreams in, given to her at birth, is handled, put into service, even withheld from her for certain nefarious purposes. Being a writer she thinks of language partly as a system, partly as a living thing over which one has control, but mostly as agency—as an act with consequences. So the question the children put to her: "Is it living or dead?" is not unreal because she thinks of language as susceptible to death, erasure; certainly imperiled and salvageable only by an effort of the will. She believes that if the bird in the hands of her visitors is dead the custodians are responsible for the corpse. For her a dead language is not only one no longer spoken or written, it is unyielding language content to admire its own paralysis.
>
> -Toni Morrison, Nobel Prize Lecture 1993

There are two main barriers to finding a rhetorical position within American discourse to represent the interrelationships of trauma and identity: on the one hand, language can be seen as a vehicle that perpetuates the dominant discourse that enables the source of trauma. On the other hand, there is concern that language itself is unable to contain the experience of trauma. These concerns are heightened as one begins to consider how the intergenerational addressee turned addressor responds to both identity and trauma. Given the fact that the intergenerational witness cannot have any direct experience of the trauma, this position can be marginalized, especially in the context of Holocaust studies where the First Generation Witness is not only seen as the primary voice, but is also seen as the only voice that should be allowed to speak. The ideal of this can perhaps be found in Emmanuel Levinas' use of the "Hineni"—of subjectivity in relation to an ethical response to the other. As Sarah Pessin in her conference presentation, "Memory in the Face of the Other: Counter-Memorialization as Ethics over Art" notes, the Hineni invokes the sense that "I can never successfully remember you; you exceed me." There is something …awesome in this relationship—a purity of memory is invoked. And yet, there is a kind of helplessness since Levinas does not necessarily advocate for the addressee becoming the addressor; there is always a movement towards the other and, in terms of the Holocaust, the past. It speaks to the notion of the Holocaust as a unique event and privileges a sense of sanctity (as does the religious origins of the term "Hineni"). Yet, as we move temporally away from the Holocaust (and as the disparity between what the Holocaust invokes in the academic world vs. mainstream American culture, which

is full of irresponsible appropriations and commercialized representations of the Holocaust), the role of the addressee turned addressor must be explored, and an ethics of transmittal must be established so that the intergenerational voice can construct meaning that can be passed down. It is through this process that new addressees can derive their own relationships to the Holocaust. Comparing intergenerational witnessing between African American cultures and those who respond to the Holocaust can allow us a means of identifying intergenerational strategies that invoke trauma and identity (both personal and communal) but are not static—locked into a past that continues to recede.

In beginning this comparison, it is important to note the contextual differences between these types of intergenerational witnesses. In some ways, African Americans had one unique advantage in responding to the history of slavery in the United States—there was never a question of "did this really happen?" The very Constitution of the United States contains within it an acknowledgement of slavery and, later, racism (along with a number of other "isms"). While one could argue this is also true in present-day Germany, it still did not prevent revisionism, whether a complete denial of the Holocaust or the more modern German historiographies that Dan Stone discusses in *Constructing the Holocaust* (as was discussed in Chapter 1). The movement towards revisionist positions in relation to the Holocaust spurred the gathering of documentation that relied on factual accuracy, which marginalizes even some First Generation Witness testimony, much less intergenerational responses. This, combined with the notion of the Holocaust as a unique event, began a process of

limiting what was considered acceptable responses. While today's revisionist rhetoric is largely dismissed (as being by extremist groups or as a political rhetoric that has more to do with current world politics in relation to Israel), the legacy of responding to revisionism still remains. In that sense, African American intergenerational witnesses have had more freedom to respond to the history of slavery and racism in the United States.

While African Americans have not needed to prove the existence of slavery within this country, they have faced a more insidious question that those responding to the Holocaust have managed to evade—the question of "How bad was it?" Institutionalized Slavery in the United States is almost 150 years in the past and even many slave narratives from the period, written in the dominant discourse and to a white audience, rarely showed the full range of brutality inherent in slavery. In contrast, visual documentation of the Holocaust depicts the horrific conditions the camps. Additionally, while the value of life under slavery was minimized to that of possessions (reproduction was encouraged in order for the slave owners to gain more slaves), the major focus of slavery was not mass genocide like the Holocaust even though the loss of life was significant (both during the Middle Passage and through acts of violence on plantations). Here, we see the rise of the issue of comparative levels of trauma. This debate can perhaps be best invoked through the conversations surrounding Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. From Stanley Crouch's claim that *Beloved* is a "holocaust novel in blackface" to critiques of Morrison's dedication at the beginning of the novel to the "60 million and more" as being 10 times the 6 million associated with the Holocaust, a

reductive competition of comparative trauma has arisen (40).[1] Yet, the question of "How bad was it?" is one that has and continues to haunt African American responses to slavery and racism. Part of this reality arises from authors who, for very specific purposes, minimized the damage done by slavery like Booker T Washington's positive presentation of slavery as a "school" in his autobiography, *Up from Slavery*:

> Then, when we rid ourselves of prejudice, or racial feeling, and look facts in the face, we must acknowledge that, notwithstanding the cruelty and moral wrong of slavery, the ten million Negroes inhabiting this country, who themselves or whose ancestors went through the school of American slavery, are in a stronger and more hopeful condition, materially, morally, and religiously, than is true of an equal number of black people in any other portion of the globe. (680-81)

In looking at Washington's statements, it is important to recognize how precarious a rhetorical situation he was in—fundraising in the South (after Reconstruction) for an African American vocational school.[2] Yet, the motives for his representations of slavery do not negate how Washington's message was received by a white audience. The main culprit for the question, "How bad was it?" seems to be a resistance to acknowledge the impact of slavery in the dominant discourse of American society—one that arises from a resistance to take responsibility and to question if these issues are still present in American society

(not just in pockets of extremists but institutionalized). As more time passes, that resistance grows stronger.

The resistance, however, has not stopped African American writers from authoring responses to the trauma of slavery even into the present. To understand this process, we can look at Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s theory of Signifyin(g), or repetition with signal difference. This operates on multiple levels: it is a repetition and revision of English and a form of intertextuality built up from one author to the next. In doing so, Signifyin(g) draws on African American oral traditions that promote both language play and intergenerational transmittals, forming a rhetorical position that encompasses both an inherited history of trauma and identity. While there are debates about the use of English to represent identity (i.e. Audre Lorde's discussion of whether the master's tools can dismantle the master's house?), the act of revision, of shifting the relationship between sign, signifier, and signified forms a remixing that allows the author to create a space to speak back to the dominant discourse. Often, that voice is not speaking alone since the other aspect of Signifyin(g)—the act of repetition and revision between African American authors also invokes a communal voice. Thus, a distinct African American tradition can be understood as well as a method of intergenerational transmission that takes the history of trauma and self reflexively (at the point of revision) brings that memory into the present.

Gates primarily grounds the idea of signification within African faith systems and their counterparts in the African American oral tradition. The main African figure that he uses is Esu (or Esu-Elegbara) who functions as an

interpreter between men and Gods (one foot on the Earth, one foot on in the heavens). This figure is often portrayed as having two mouths—an indication that he speaks for both men and the Gods. Gates focuses on this myth to establish the idea of the double voice: "Signifyin(g) is the figure of the double-voiced, epitomized by Esu's depictions in sculpture as having two mouths" (*Signifying* xxv). Thus, the two mouths indicate a duality of meaning within one figure. Gates then connects the figure of Esu with that of the Signifying Monkey in black folklore by saying, "If the Esu-Elegbara stands as the central figure of the Ifa system of interpretation, then his Afro-American relative, the Signifying Monkey, stands as the rhetorical principle in Afro-American discourse" (*Signifying* 44). The connection between the two is one of family although the Signifying Monkey also functions as a trickster figure. Indeed, it is perhaps the "trickster" part of his nature that makes this figure the sign for a specifically black use of language. The key to the story is that while the Monkey navigates between "this relationship between the literal and the figurative," the Lion cannot "mediate between these two poles of signification, of meaning" (*Signifying* 55). It is the ability to create multiple signifieds that enables the Monkey to fool the Lion.

From this foundation, Gates develops his theory of Signifyin(g) as "a metaphor for black intertextuality and, therefore, for formal literary history" (*Signifying* 55). If "intertextuality represents a process of repetition and difference," then the act of taking a received meaning and then revising that sign/signified relationship through the role of the signifier, as the Signifying Monkey does, creates a strategy for black authors to formally tie their work with

that of their predecessors using a strategy that reflects their own culture (*Signifying* 60). Thus, the framework for the black literary tradition is emphasized: "the originality of so much of the black tradition emphasizes refiguration, or repetition and difference, or troping, underscoring the foregrounding of the chain of signifiers, rather than the mimetic representation of a novel content" (*Signifying* 79). While using African culture as a key point of his conceptualization of Signifyin(g), Gates draws on Western ideas of language (specifically sign=signified/signifier) and disrupts them by de-emphasizing the focus on the sign's connection to its abstract meaning through his emphasis on the role of the speaker (the signifier) in determining the meaning of the words. The very fact that Gates Signifies on the Western concept of the Sign is a political move of empowerment, one that Homi Bhabha might characterize as a "Third Space:" "It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew" (p. 208). Ultimately, Gates' act of Signifyin(g) can be characterized as a retelling of stories—one that transforms it into a theoretical method for mapping African American culture and intergenerational witnessing.

So, let's take a brief look at how Signifyin(g) operates in *Beloved*. The first level of intergenerational response lies in the true story of Margaret Garner, a slave who escapes in 1856 and, on the point of capture, tries to kill her children rather than have them return into slavery. Garner succeeds in killing her young

daughter. Morrison repeats the story but revises it into a kind of ghost tale, allowing her to explore the issues of race, love, ownership, and (re)memory through the figure of Beloved, the child Sethe kills and others who also died under slavery (there is some slippage about who and what Beloved really is). In that moment of revision, Morrison becomes the intergenerational witness who responds back to the initial trauma(s) through a postmodernist lens—one that seeks to explore the reason behind the choice to kill one's own child rather than return her to slavery. Morrison's novel also offers a brutal image of slavery; while many slave narratives deal with atrocity, it is not necessarily presented in such a brutal way.[3] The ideals about gender and sexuality in the period, for instance, made it difficult for Black female writers to fully express the sexual exploitation that they and others experienced. As an intergenerational witness, Morrison has more freedom from those conventions.

One can also look at the figure of Sethe's brutal slave owner, "Schoolteacher," and see another aspect of Signifyin(g)—if slavery was, as Washington claimed, a school than Morrison's revision signals how brutal a school it could be. The process of Signifyin(g) self-reflexively calls attention to the role each author embodies as they relate back in time to trauma. The act of revision foregrounds the choices that the author makes in writing the response. In Morrison's case, the process of self-reflexivity is also highlighted by the metafictional movement she makes at the end: this is not a "story to pass on" and yet here it is—passed on to a new audience. In her discussion of the role of silence in terms of the unspeakable in *Beloved*, Naomi Mandel discusses the shift

at the end of the text "It was not a story to pass on" to "This is not a story to pass on" as a narrative of forgetting (194). On one level, this passage can be read that way. Yet, as a self-reflexive movement from Margaret Garner to Morrison herself, it speaks to the inescapability of the past. The story exists and must be passed on. It is in the act of calling attention to one's role of addressee turned addressor that an ethical position begins to be articulated. In this way, the intergenerational witness does not simply appropriate the original witness. That witness is invoked simultaneously with the new response. Oral traditions adapt through time but still carry with them the invocation of the culture and the past—one's ancestors. Yet, these stories are improvised with each new speaker, adapting and changing throughout time in order to maintain relevancy.

In exploring discussions of intergenerational witnessing in other countries like Israel and Brazil, one can see the importance of self-reflexivity as an ethical response to the Holocaust, especially in texts that tend to be more fictionalized. In her discussion Second Generation writing in Israel, Hanna Yaoz notes that two categories emerge:

> Essentially there were two clear trends in the literary expression of the Holocaust complex, one historical and one transhistorical. The first trend is mimetic, based on the conventions of the various forms of realism… Transhistorical prose fiction, however, avoids reference to specific historical fact or conventional historical conceptions. The factual background rests on a sort of inner set of rules that derive from a world ruled by mythical powers, by

> madness, or by the absurd. Second-generation prose writing moves from the real to the fantastic. (Yaoz 161)

Yaoz goes on to note that the movement towards the fantastic in Second Generation writers in Israel reflects the intergenerational witnesses' response to the trauma of the Holocaust. These texts are not necessarily divorced from the history but, rather, they focus on how the intergenerational witness understands, integrates, and conceptualizes that history. In looking at the example of David Grossman's *See Under: Love*, which was discussed in the first chapter, it explores the process of learning (the misunderstanding of the word Sonderkommando) and uses metafiction to call attention to act of writing itself.

In Márcio Seligman-Silva's discussion of Jewish responses to the Holocaust in Brazil, he draws on Regina Igel's categorization of Holocaust responses (written by both First and intergenerational witnesses) as "pedagogical" (presenting what happened without elaboration), "fictional" (omniscient third person narrator with literary strategies, and "hybrid" (a mix) :

> This typology could be transposed in terms of a theory of representation that runs from a "representationalist" posture. This would contemplate a "direct" and "objective" representation of the historical facts, to a very different one that would be marked by a consciously assumed "literary" undertaking, one that engages in a reflection on the difficulties and strategies for representing the "real" and, in particular, the Shoah, a historical fact that must be

> considered an event that challenges any strategy of representation. (64)

In this discussion, one can see striking similarities to the self-reflexive characteristics of the intergenerational responses discussed so far in this work, especially Spiegelman, Skibell, and Foer. The use of the literary or hybrid characterizations in Brazil is also marked by proximity ("at a later moment") to the event for both First and intergenerational witnesses—an indication that as the past recedes, literary strategies are increasingly needed (64). Seligman-Silva is careful to say that these characteristics are not absolute; he also does not privilege First Generation writing over intergenerational, noting: "for a survivor like Jorge Semprum, the best testimonies of the Shoah have been written by those who are not survivors" (66). Here, one sees the value of the ability to connect to the event, regardless of whether one experienced the Holocaust directly or not.

The fact that Jewish responses to the Holocaust in Brazil comes from a community whose writing is marginalized might explain why there is less stress on First Generation witnesses since the ability to pass on these experiences is limited. Yet, this must be combined with an intrinsic openness to what intergenerational texts offer:

> We must learn to see the very texts that are born from the catastrophe as complex *events* that should be dealt with in all of their strata: aesthetic, testimonial, individual, collective, mnemonic, historical, and so on. Even the text that appears scarcest in aesthetic terms can hold a vital literary lesson, just as

> the novel that appears far removed from the facts or a very dense narrative in linguistic terms contains testimonial elements. Testimony and literature are inseparable. (Seligman-Silva 65)

What one sees is a focus on the text itself; judgment on the text is without precedent (to echo Lyotard). Instead, what Seligman-Silva is arguing is that these texts need to be considered based on its merits—as events that contain multiple components. In looking at both Israeli and Brazilian intergenerational responses, one can see the movement towards acceptance of these texts. This is not a wholesale embrace, however. Grossman's text is certainly not the first intergenerational text in Israel but it was one of the first to garner popularity and acceptance. The fact that intergenerational writers in both Israel and Brazil incorporate self-reflexive modes and question the strategies of how they represent trauma speaks to an ethics where the intergenerational witness does not usurp the position of the First Generation witness since the self-reflexive mode calls attention to a subject position in relation to but separate from the ones who experienced the Holocaust. The growing acceptance of these writers and their work also speaks to ongoing concerns about avoiding stasis—the Holocaust experience must be made relevant for new generations.

To use Morrison's terminology from her Nobel Lecture, the bird/language can be either alive or dead; one can remained locked into the past or to make it new. Certainly, the call to become a new addressor is being answered in American responses to the Holocaust. In charting the arcs established in the previous chapters, we can see a pattern of self-reflexive texts that specifically

invoke subjective rather than universalizing communities of memory. At the same time, the community of memory revivifies but does not lock one into the past: "For us, by contrast, a community of memory is prospective, not memorializing; its memory is in the service of future transformations, not a mythicized past; its history is critical, not monumental. A community of memory, as we seek to discuss it here, problematizes the present rather than sacrilizing the past" (Milchman and Rosenberg 252). In addition to the role of communities of memory, we also saw thematic approaches that stylistically invoke aspects of survivor testimony, specifically the death-life narrative. The other major theme on the Banality of Evil speaks to a consciousness on why the Holocaust must be transmitted; Evil is not a just a metaphysical concept perpetuated by monstrosity; the potential for evil is both universal and common. The central connection for all these author (Spiegelman, Skibell, Foer, and Wallant) lies in the ability to have an affect: "Words have instrumentality when the word *Jew* becomes a fact or a thing, a star to be worn, a reason to be defiled. Words also have materiality when they fictively render that process into a text that lives in its effects on others" (Schwarz 22). The ability to transmit memory while at the same time acknowledging the complexity of the Holocaust by using subjective rather than universal positions are key characteristics in valuing the role of the intergenerational witness.

This is not to say that every work of intergenerational witnessing was not without its flaws; in exploring the film adaptations of both *Everything is Illuminated* and *The Pawnbroker*, we are faced with questions about how medium

potentially impacts the messages of the books. The fact that these issues tend to emerge in relation to the themes on the Banality of Evil is telling. In his discussion of art and the Holocaust, Stephen Feinstein notes, "If there is a problem with art, it is less with the artist and more with the medium and the audience" (247). In taking that point to the discussion of film, the concern of how the audience will react to the message of the Banality of Evil, specifically if they are made to consider their own lives in relation to the theme, leads to mediations of the theme or its removal entirely. In *A War Against Memory*, Isabella Wollaston notes, "Certain forms of the rhetoric of remembrance simplify the Holocaust by presenting it in dualistic terms as a battle of absolute good and absolute evil, highlighting the 'lessons' to be learned by reference to the faith and heroism of victims *in extremis*" (10). The focus on relating to the victim is more commonly accepted than the more complex subject relationship that can be built with the perpetrator or the bystander. The fact that good and evil take on metaphysical characteristics also removes complex identification in that it is less grounded in everyday reality. That these choices are made before the film is even seen by the audience is problematic—how can we know how an audience will truly react if they never are given the possibility?

The question about the potential for the audience to connect to the Banality of Evil as a theme in multiple mediums can perhaps be answered by a consideration of African American intergenerational witnessing. Signifyin(g) allows authors to pass on memory, to integrate a history of trauma with their own lives, but does it connect with a wide audience? The answer is not simple. Many

years ago, I was in a graduate class discussing Toni Morrison's work and her widespread popularity through the promotion of her work by Oprah Winfrey. The question posed to the class was whether Morrison's popularity meant that she was not a specifically African American writer. After all, if her books were so popular, than it might indicate that her work was universal (in a Liberal Humanist sense) rather than specifically African American. This brought forth a range of responses—some argued that she was American (and some, that she was American in the context of counteracting a marginalization of African American literature), some argued that she was specifically African American—that her stories were specifically grounded in black experiences. Very few argued for a hybrid position—one where Morrison could be both specific and universal. In *Interrupting Auschwitz,* Josh Cohen notes the importance of the singular: "The essential unity of the human race, far from authorizing the subordination of singularity to collective identity, demands the maintenance of singularity—and so alterity—as its first and last imperative. The true ethical counteraction to the destruction of the human is not the restoration of the destroyed 'Self-Subject' to its rightful power over the other" (143). In claiming Morrison's work as not representing African American experience, there is a risk of appropriation. The dominant discourse adapts and absorbs the oppositional voice and, in doing so, empties it of its meaning, thus allowing the dominant discourse to remain in power. So, the question of how an audience might react is forced to identify with the Banality of Evil is compounded with the question of whether American culture already has a system for minimizing the possibility in the first place?

The discussion of slavery in the United States has always faced an obstacle in that Americans are directly implicated in this history. In some ways, studying the Holocaust is easier because, while accepting some responsibility for the Holocaust in that America turned away refugees and failed to bomb the rail lines, Americans do not directly feel responsible. Yet, as one pushes the discussion of the Holocaust deeper, it does pose challenges for American discourse. In his discussion of the coalitions between Jews and blacks in the United States (as well as the failure of those coalitions), Eric Sundquist notes the impact on American idealism: "As activists, polemicists, and writers, they reset the course of American liberalism—its promise that all could belong to the nation, as well as the seeming demise of the idea of one nation to which all could belong; its promise of equality, as well as the failure to find a definition of equality on which all could agree" (527). The reason for this failure is perhaps best illustrated in a comment that Seligman-Silva makes about Brazilian Jewish writers on the Holocaust engaging in an "international dialogue around the theme that has shown itself to be central in the reformulation of Western culture (that is, in the work of criticism on the *Aufklärung* [Enlightenment] by Adorno and Horkheimer)…" (79). Given that Enlightenment thinking is still central to American thought, the study of the Holocaust can potentially challenge those beliefs.

In a way, it is possible to look at the institution of slavery and the Holocaust as a kind of bookending of the Enlightenment. The rise of Postmodern thought is directly linked to the Holocaust, to the fact that the values of reason and

equality that were considered the hallmarks of modern society still allowed the Holocaust to exist: “The fact is that the Holocaust signified an immense human failure. It did harm to ethics by showing how ethical teachings could be overridden or even subverted to serve the interests of genocide” (Rubenstein and Roth 368). Indeed, the quality of reason enabled the Nazis to carry out genocide on a massive scale. Yet, if one looks at the history of slavery, at its ideological constructions, one can see that from its beginnings, the Enlightenment contained the ability to Other:

> Writing, especially after the printing press became so widespread, was taken to be the *visible* sign of reason. Blacks were “reasonable” and hence “men” if—and only if—they demonstrated mastery of “the arts and sciences,” the eighteenth century’s formula for writing. So, while the Enlightenment is characterized by its foundation on man’s ability to reason, it simultaneously used the absence and presence of reason to delimit and circumscribe the very humanity of the cultures and people of color which Europeans had been “discovering” since the Renaissance. (8)

The Enlightenment, with its ideals of reason and equality, also contained the possibility of negating the humanity. Using Subject/Object relationships, Enlightenment ideals were circumscribed by their opposite. Although laws and attitudes changed over time, the fact that these ideals could be a foundation for the Holocaust is not without precedent.

In understanding what an ethics of intergenerational witnessing might mean, there are a multitude of concerns that these new addressors must face. There is a sense of an ethical relationship to those who experienced the Holocaust. This operates in how one constructs a community of memory that revivifies without locking one's perception into the past. In addition, there is a sense of obligation to the survivor as well—a concern about how to transmit the survivor's perspective without supplanting it. Further, there is a question of how to connect the Holocaust to new generations in ways that force them to consider the implications of this event on their own ways of thinking. The truth is that Enlightenment ideals are still central to how we conceptualize what it means to be an American—it is the center of our notion of freedom and equality. Yet, there still exists the ability to do great evil, even if all one does is nothing. In the end, is it even possible to have a concrete idea of what such witnessing would look like? No, but that only means that we are forced into judgments without set precedents. In exploring an ethics of intergenerational witnessing to the Holocaust, it is imperative to look at these addressors in terms of their complexity, the ways that these witnesses address multiple concerns without universalizing the response. In that sense, intergenerational witnessing becomes more about transmittal and exchange rather than paralysis.

Notes:

[1]The point about the dedication to "60 million" is discussed by a number of critics, including Naomi Mendel, Stanley Crouch, Peter Novick, and Emily Budick.

[2]This is not to say that Washington never spoke out openly against racial prejudice and racial violence (lynchings) but that the circumstances of his position and purpose certainly mediated how he discussed racial issues.

[3]Given that most slave narratives were written to a white audience, many of the authors were cautious about how they represented their experiences. For instance, Harriet Jacobs, in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, was very conscious about the way she dealt with sexuality and sexual exploitation –a response to both racial and gender constructions.

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